

Church Structures

A range of feelings were expressed regarding the hierarchical structure of the church. Participants expressed feelings of frustration, helplessness, desperation, powerlessness, and disconnection. There was also a call for the empowerment of lay people based on real collaboration at all levels. Many participants called for a reform of hierarchical church structures, and for the inclusion of women in decision-making at all levels of the church. Some participants also sought the consideration of women for ordination to the priesthood and for the permanent diaconate, as well as a review of compulsory celibacy for clergy.

Understandings and Expressions of Faith

Though concerns were expressed regarding different understandings and experiences of church, many participants expressed a strong commitment to their personal faith and value their church. People also expressed hope for renewal. Great support was expressed for local clergy and there was an overall recognition of the good they do. Some clergy expressed their personal struggle of ministering in these challenging times. Participants called for greater formation for parents presenting for sacraments and for religious formation for young people to be more parish based. They also expressed the need to renew our celebration of the Mass and our liturgical ministries, to improve communication between parishioners and Parish Pastoral Councils, and to offer adults opportunities for faith formation.

Young People

At each of the sessions, people remarked on the absence of young people participating both at the listening exercise and in the life of the Church. Participants expressed great concern for the future of the Church without the involvement of young people. However, this was coupled with a real desire to involve young people in the faith community and to enable them to make their faith relevant to their lives. It was noted that there is a need for committed adults to model faith for young people, and for a similar listening exercise to be conducted with young people. People identified various ways of involving young people such as through Parish Pastoral Councils, youth Masses and youth choirs. It was felt too that there was a need to work more closely with Kerry Diocesan Youth Service. Participants also suggested exploring faith with young people using modern technology such as Facebook and other social networking sites.

Conclusion

This report was presented to the Diocesan Pastoral Council in November 2010. They appreciated greatly the honest and forthright comments and suggestions made by participants. By way of acknowledging what was said by participants, the Diocesan Pastoral Council wished to communicate the findings to everyone in the diocese. The findings from the listening exercise will play an essential role in shaping the future direction and actions of the diocese, as it implements the Diocesan Pastoral Plan.

A more detailed report of the Listening Exercise and Diocesan Safeguarding Children Policies and Procedures are available on the diocesan website.

www.dioceseofkerry.ie



Together in Hope



Pastoral Letter
Advent 2010



Dear Friends,

These are indeed challenging times for our nation and our church. The financial crisis, with which we are now faced, is a cause of great concern for all of us. It is having a severe impact on the livelihoods of many. The increase in unemployment, the re-emergence of emigration and the huge financial pressures for so many, are all creating an air of despondency in our country. I am especially conscious of the added pressures on families as we approach Christmas. It may seem difficult to have hope at this time.

As we celebrate Advent, a time of hope, we are reminded of God's love and concern for each one of us. The birth of Christ in a stable at Christmas reminds us in a real way that God comes in our ordinary lives. Our God is really Emmanuel, God-with-us. It is my sincere prayer that this Advent will be a time of renewed confidence that God is with us at this time. I pray for all of us, that faced with the challenges of this present time, we will each do what we can in our own particular circumstances to show solidarity and concern for each other, and I pray for our political leaders, that God will provide them with wisdom and courage in their task of guiding our nation in these turbulent times.

For the Church, these past years have also been challenging. We have been dealing with the scandal of clerical child sexual abuse, and also with the failure of Church authorities to protect children. The Diocesan Pastoral Council, a representative group of lay people and priests who advise me in responding to the pastoral needs of the diocese, and I felt that people needed an opportunity to express where they were at regarding church at this time. In response to Pope Benedict's letter to the Irish people, we decided to carry out a listening exercise throughout the diocese. I wish to thank all of you who contributed to these gatherings. The findings of these gatherings were recently presented to the Diocesan Pastoral Council. It was agreed that these findings should be made available to all throughout the diocese, that you would know that we have taken seriously your comments and observations on Clerical Child Sexual Abuse, on Church Structures, on Understandings and Expressions Faith and on the needs of Young People.

I wish once again to acknowledge and apologise for the hurt and pain that survivors of clerical child sexual abuse have experienced. I greatly regret the inadequate manner in which Church authorities responded to survivors and to the protection of children. I assure you that I am committed to working at local and national level with those who have been abused. This has been a period of enormous learning for me personally and for the church in general. I am committed to ensuring that we implement all of the necessary policies and structures to guard against this happening again. Safeguarding children committees have been established in every parish throughout the diocese and the work of these committees is monitored on a regular basis. I am confident as a result of the measures now in place that the Church in our diocese is a safer place for children.

I appreciate the commitment of so many people involved in different areas of parish life. Participants in the listening exercise called for the inclusion of lay people in decision-making at all levels of our Church, an issue has also been named in our Diocesan Pastoral Plan. I am committed to the empowerment of lay people based on real collaboration at all levels, and to the inclusion of women in decision-making in our diocese. Building on the work of Parish Pastoral Councils, we are now developing ways in pastoral areas and at diocesan level, so that our decision-making is informed by all voices. People expressed their strong personal faith at our gatherings. I thank all of those involved in fostering faith in our communities and invite parish communities to avail of the resources in our diocese to deepen their experience of faith, prayer and liturgy. Many people expressed a real desire to involve young people in the faith community and to enable them to make their faith relevant to their lives. To complement the work of our teachers, schools and Kerry Diocesan Youth Service, at present, the diocese is undertaking a number of key actions to respond to and support the faith needs of young people.

As the year draws to a close, a year that has been difficult in so many ways, I am heartened by the faith commitment of so many people in our diocese. I am encouraged by the desire and commitment of people to work at making our Church a better place, a place that is marked by the values of God's kingdom, a place of honesty, justice, openness, and compassion. May we continue to pray and work together for his Kingdom among us.

I wish you a joyful, peaceful and blessed Christmas

+ Bill Murphy

Bishop Bill Murphy

Let's Listen: Listening Exercise 2010

This is a summary of the findings from the listening exercise conducted on behalf of the Diocesan Pastoral Council. A more detailed report is available on the diocesan website,

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of the listening exercise was to give people an opportunity to express their views and feelings regarding the Church at this present time. The exercise was carried out in each of the 12 pastoral areas in May, June and Sept 2010. An open invitation was extended to people of all the parishes in the diocese. Each gathering was facilitated by a team of three and incorporated reflection, small group discussion, large group sharing and prayer. At each of these meetings, a commitment was made to document what was said and communicate it to the Diocesan Pastoral Council. The vast majority of participants stated that they found the exercise both valuable and worthwhile.

In particular they expressed satisfaction with the open and respectful manner in which the exercise was carried out. There was a general consensus concerning the value of the listening process. As one participant stated, it's not about 'being solved or fixed, just being heard'. A number of participants expressed frustration with the time constraints experienced at the sessions and would have welcomed more time for discussion.

Four main themes emerged from the Listening Exercise:

- Clerical Child Sexual Abuse;
- Church Structures;
- Understandings and Expressions of Faith;
- Young People.

Clerical Child Sexual Abuse

In responding to the issue of clerical child sexual abuse, participants identified two distinct aspects:

- The nature and extent of the abuse;
- The handling of the issues by the Church, globally, nationally and locally.

Regarding the nature and extent of clerical child sexual abuse, participants expressed strong feelings of anger, shame, disappointment and disgust towards the perpetrators of abuse, especially because these perpetrators were ordained ministers of the Church. Participants also felt a deep sadness and hurt for the survivors who had endured such terrible ordeals. Contributors conveyed a strong desire for the recognition of the experiences of survivors and also for their healing.

In terms of how Church authorities handled cases of clerical child sexual abuse, participants also expressed strong feelings of anger, hurt, disappointment, frustration and disgust. Those present stated their strong desire for truth and openness regarding the handling of cases. People stated that they wanted to see a move away from secrecy within the church and a move towards external monitoring. Participants called for a commitment to the implementation of Safeguarding Children policies and procedures in the diocese and at national level. The need for a national spokesperson for the church was also identified.