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| |  | | --- | | Irish Bishops' Conference, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Co Kildare  Tel: (01) 505 3000 Fax: (01) 601 6413 Website: [www.catholicbishops.ie](http://www.catholicbishops.ie/)  **Press Release - Thursday 28 February 2019 - Immediate**  **Attn: Newsdesks, Photodesks and Religious Affairs Correspondents**  **‘Placing Hope in Faith’ - a listening process in the Diocese of Killala**  **Background**  The official launch of stage two of the ‘Placing Hope in Faith’ listening process in the Diocese of Killala will take place this evening in the Newman Institute, Ballina, Co Mayo.  The objective of the listening process is to gather insights from across the diocese so as to inform Church planning for the future.  According to Bishop John Fleming, Bishop of Killala, “this has been an inclusive initiative in which people of all ages have been invited to take part: those who participate in Mass each weekend, those who attend occasionally and those who may no longer walk with the Church for whatever reason.  In particular I have been anxious to hear the voice of young people in this process.  In what we are doing I am guided by the words of Pope Francis, ‘communicating means sharing, and sharing demands listening and acceptance.  Listening is much more than simply hearing.  Hearing is about receiving information, while listening is about communication, and calls for closeness.  Listening allows us to get things right, and not simply to be passive onlookers, users or consumers.  Listening also means being able to share questions and doubts, to journey side by side, to banish all claims to absolute power and to put our abilities and gifts at the service of the common good.’  The outcome of the listening process will result in proposals which will inform diocesan policy and underpin our Pastoral Plan for the Diocese.”  **Placing Hope in Faith**  After a few years of reflection and debate, a decision had been taken by Bishop Fleming, and priests of the diocese, at their annual conference in Westport in February 2017 to ask the people what they thought and felt about Church matters and how there might be a way forward for the Diocese of Killala to respond to the many challenges of the present time.  The decision was an effective recognition that the future of the diocese will be in the hands of ‘lay’ Catholics.  When the ‘Placing Hope in Faith’ diocesan listening process was launched by Bishop Fleming in the Newman Institute on 31 January 2018, before a diocesan gathering of over 200, stage one of the process was set in train.  **Steering Committee**  A steering committee was appointed comprising two women and one man from each of the four deaneries in the diocese, five priests and Bishop Fleming.  A first meeting in June 2017 decided that the group needed to spend until Christmas 2017 reflecting together, discussing strategies, planning and being resourced by suitably qualified experts.  **Priest numbers**  An analysis of priest numbers in the diocese concluded that 20 years from then (2037) a considered estimate is that there will be between three and six priests left in full public ministry in the 22 parishes of the diocese.  **Mass attendance survey**  In September 2017, on three consecutive weekends, the number of people attending Masses in every parish was noted.  The survey, though not scientific or conclusive, was really a snap-shot of attendance in parishes and there was the added complication that some parishioners attend Masses in neighbouring parishes.  Overall it seems that practice at the moment in Killala is running at an average of around 30%.  **Survey**  The steering committee decided that the main thrust of the listening process should be through a simple open-ended survey; that it should be anonymous and confidential in order to elicit as truthful a picture as possible; that it should be open to everyone (apart from young children); and that its results should be compiled by a reputable independent agency.  Surveys, and the accompanying envelopes, in which they were to be individually sealed upon completion, were distributed widely.  **Parish Councils**  In January 2018 members of the steering group visited every parish in the diocese and met each parish council (or a group of parishioners, if no parish council had been elected).  The purpose of the meeting was to hear what members of parish councils thought and felt, to explain a decision to have a survey as part of a listening process and to encourage parish councils to ensure that as many as possible participate.  **Survey results**  When the survey was completed it was found that, between surveys completed manually and those completed online, 1,011 adults and 356 teenagers –  a total of 1,457 – had responded.  This level of return ensured a sufficient sample on which to base credible results.  The Institute for Action Research in Kerry was commissioned to digitise the responses, to transfer the data to SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) and to report to the steering committee on their findings.  **Proposals for Assembly**  The steering committee considered the report from the Institute for Action Research and, under 16 headings and devised 129 proposals to be considered by over 300 delegates from around the diocese at the Assembly on 1 July 2018.  In preparation for the Assembly, a 32-page A4 programme was published and distributed to parish councils and to delegates so that they would be familiar with what was proposed.  **Electronic voting**  The diocese employed Milestone Productions from Cavan to supply their system of electronic voting on Assembly day.  There were a number of reasons for this: to ensure that the voting was completely private and to continue the respectful and confidential approach of the listening process up to then; to get (almost) instant results displayed on a screen for delegates to see; and, not least, to ensure that, on the day, we would manage efficiently a long programme of voting.  **What do we do now?**  Up to the Assembly in July 2018, the focus was on listening to the people and getting their views on what the future of the parishes and dioceses would look like, particularly on what needed to be done now.  After the delegates at the Assembly decided specific directions and approaches, they made three specific recommendations:  (i)             appoint focus groups to implement the decisions made at the Assembly  (ii)           appoint moderators (or leaders) of the focus groups, and  (iii)         appoint a diocesan steering group to oversee the operation of the focus groups, to evaluate progress and to encourage all involved.    Ten focus groups have been themed as follows:  1. Family/Pastoral Care; 2. Prayer; 3. Liturgy/Deacons; 4. Youth; 5. Management of parishes; 6. Lay participation; 7. Inclusion; 8. Women in the Church; 9. Education in the faith; 10. Vocations.  There are over 100 members in total in the ten groups.  Moderators have been appointed and the official launch of stage two occurs this evening in the Newman Institute, Ballina.  The focus groups are expected to complete their deliberations by this December and the actual implementation of initiatives is planned for 2020.    **ENDS**     * Bishop John Fleming is Bishop of Killala. The Diocese of Killala consists of 22 parishes and includes portions of counties Mayo and Sligo.  Killala has a Catholic population of about 37,000 including 37 priests.  Saint Muredach is the patron saint of the diocese.  See  [www.killaladiocese.org](http://www.killaladiocese.org/) * The Newman Institute, Ballina, is a charitable organisation which works in conjunction with the Diocese of Killala.  A core aim of The Newman Institute is to provide an opportunity for people to learn more about their faith through accredited and non-accredited faith formation courses.  The Newman Institute also seeks to address the ongoing need for Adult Religious Education and Faith Formation in the Diocese of Killala and beyond.     **For media contact:** Catholic Communications Office Maynooth: Martin Long 00353 (0) 86 172 7678 and Brenda Drumm 00353 (0) 87 310 4444.    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