

LE CHÉILE 2025 GATHERING FOR PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL MEMBERS

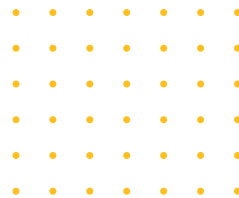
*Continuing the
Conversation*



Diocese of Clonfert
Diocese of Galway,
Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora

Céad Míle Fáilte

A Message From Bishop Michael



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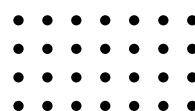
SEEDS of a new beginning

The presence of so many Parish Pastoral Council members, sharing faith and commitment, gave a strong sense of what is possible when we walk together. From prayer and music, through keynote reflections and table conversations, the day showed the richness of gifts in our parishes and the desire to serve.

A Deeply Encouraging Experience

On May 10th, 2025, some 200 representatives of the newly trained Parish Pastoral Councils from the Diocese of Clonfert and the Diocese of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora gathered at the Meadow Court Hotel, Loughrea. The purpose of the gathering was to give participants an experience of being with other faith committed parishioners and to equip them with practical insights into leading relevant, forward-looking Parish Pastoral Councils. From the opening hymn led by Mr Paul Keogh's (Elation Ministries) vibrant music to the closing prayer, the atmosphere was one of gratitude and possibility.

Our keynote speakers, Ms Patricia Carroll (Archdiocese of Dublin) and Father Billy Swan (Diocese of Ferns), unpacked themes of co-responsibility, listening, Parish Eucharist, and mission, while table conversations surfaced the local hopes and challenges Parish Pastoral Councils were facing. Seeing the breadth of commitment—priests and volunteers in one room—proved deeply encouraging and created fresh momentum across both dioceses. Shared lunch provided further space for chatting and mutual support. There was no doubt that the day strengthened unity, clarified roles, and energised members of Parish Pastoral Councils for the road ahead.





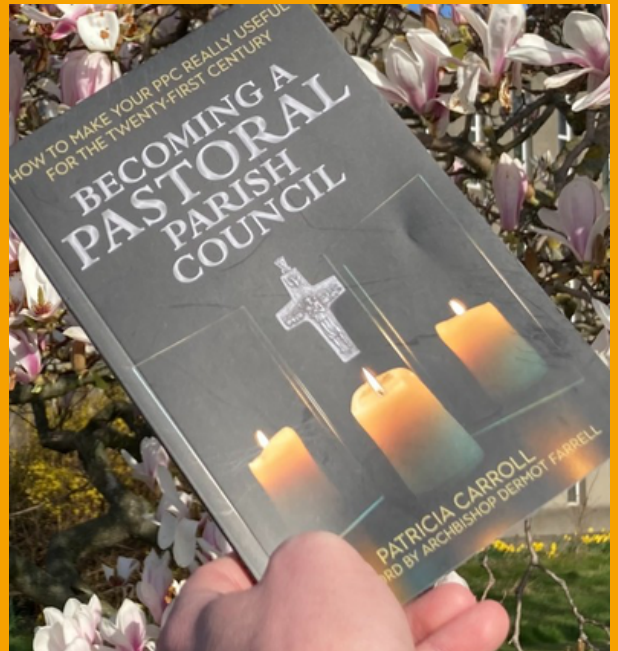
Patricia's Dream For Parish Pastoral Councils

A Pastoral Pastoral Council is...

A faith-filled leadership group through which priests and people pray and work together as co-responsible partners in furthering the mission of Christ in their parish.



For the next Parish Pastoral Council Meeting: How does this definition sit with me/us?



Prayer

Unlike a community group or residents association, a Parish Pastoral Council is inspired by the Catholic Faith. It begins with faith, is motivated by faith and is there to serve the faith community and to reach out through them to others. Each meeting should start with a significant moment of prayer and prayerful reflection. This needs to be prepared – perhaps some training is needed. It is a time to notice what God is doing with us and with the parish. It is a time to connect with God and to bring the life of the parish with its ups and downs before God. Perhaps a sacred space with a lit candle and picture, symbols of the life of the parish might help focus minds and hearts. An appropriate reading from the Bible should be included. Time for each member to pray or to ask for prayers is advisable.



For the next Parish Pastoral Council Meeting:
What part does prayer play in our Parish Pastoral Council?
What practical steps should we take?

Pastoral

Parish Pastoral Councils are Pastoral in their focus. Drawing inspiration from the care of the Good Shepherd himself- they are about caring – caring for the people and nurturing the faith life of the parish. A Parish Pastoral Council should be listening for pastoral and spiritual needs that need to be responded to. The quality of our Pastoral Care tells us something about ourselves as a Christian Community!



For the next Parish Pastoral Council Meeting:

Who should we be caring for in this parish?

Planning

An effective Parish Pastoral Council should be proactive – forward looking; planning – rather than merely reactive, dealing solely with the things that come up and the day-to-day activities of Parish Life. A Parish Pastoral Council should attune to the important changes in our culture around faith and faith matters. It needs to look at the bigger picture, the longer term. It should identify key areas that if attended to could bring the parish to a new place. This needs discernment – a certain sifting through ideas in order to make decisions and follow them with concrete plans.



For the next Parish Pastoral Council Meeting:

Do we have a vision of where we hope the Parish will be in 2 years' time?

Missionary

Parish Pastoral Councils are not about maintaining the parish for the parish's sake – they should be ever outward looking – reaching out to young people, young families, people who find life difficult, the sick, the bereaved, the poor and those who feel themselves on the margins of society and the Church. This requires thought, discernment, vision, imagination, effort and courage. Parish Pastoral Councils gently challenge the parish community to be a community of service and witness to the living out of the Gospel call to love God and love one another. "Life grows by being given away and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others." – Pope Francis



For the next Parish Pastoral Council Meeting:

Who should we be reaching out to? How?





Father Billy's Dream of a Meaningful Celebration of Mass

The Weekly Highpoint

The celebration of the Mass (the Eucharist) is the highpoint of our Catholic Community Celebrations. This is especially so of the Sunday Mass – which recalls the day of Resurrection and the presence of the Risen Jesus among his people. It is the day when the faith community as a whole gather to celebrate their faith, to bring before God their needs, to be strengthened as individuals and as a community and to be inspired in living out their faith in the week to come.



For the next Parish Pastoral Council Meeting:

How do we prepare for Sunday Mass?

All Involved

The Parish Pastoral Council should have a special care for ensuring that the Sunday Celebrations of Mass in their parish are well prepared and that all are involved in a variety of roles (Ushers, Ministers of the Word, Ministers of Communion, Prayers of the Faithful, Gift Bearers, Altar Servers, Choir, Collectors, Altar Society, Sacristy etc.)



For the next Parish Pastoral Council Meeting:

How are we doing with getting people involved in Sunday Mass? Anything we are missing that we could do?



Learning about the Mass

Our participation in the Mass can be greatly enhanced by some simple knowledge of what is going on, of the rituals and actions, the readings and the prayers. There are many programmes available to help people understand the Mass better – perhaps all parishes should make these available at some stage to members of Parish Pastoral Councils, those involved in the various ministries and the wider parish community.



For the next Parish Pastoral Council Meeting:

Could we put on a short talk or course on the Mass?
For who? When? And How?

The Pastoral Priorities and the Parish Council – a short exercise



Patricia encouraged Parish Pastoral Councils to do this small exercise and to reflect upon its outcomes.

Step 1

Examine the five key aspects of Pastoral Life in your Parish

- Prayer and the Celebration of the Sunday Mass
- Care for the People of the Parish and beyond
- Strengthening the life of the Faith Community
- Formation/Education about faith
- Missionary Outreach

Step 2

Let each member of the Council give a number to each topic from one to five – one means less energy is given to this; five means a lot of energy is given to this.

Step 3

Add the numbers together to see in what order the topics are rated by the Council as a whole.



Step 4

What does it reveal about your parish's current pastoral priorities?

Step 5

How might this exercise inform the priorities, planning and work of your Parish Pastoral Council in the immediate, medium and long term.

"I finally see a roadmap for turning prayer into a concrete mission!"

"Seeing nearly two hundred of us gathered in one room convinced me the Spirit is alive and busy in the West."

"We moved from theory to heartbeat; our councils should finally start to feel alive."



Afternoon Session

During the afternoon interactive session, Patricia recast Parish Pastoral Councils as faith-filled, co-responsible partners in mission, united through “Prayer, Planning, and Partnership.” Working in table groups, the delegates used “Conversations in the Spirit” to identify where, as councils, they were spending most of their energies. They also tried to identify one concrete pastoral response their parish could launch within six months. This discernment method modelled how councils should listen to the Spirit, one another, and local realities before coming to any decisions. By session’s end, ideas, worries and hopes were shared and some with actionable ideas proposed. Patricia stressed that such steps help councils mature, develop, and remain sustainable as contexts change, because “pastoral councils are communities of faithful believers in Jesus Christ.”



Closing Moments

Participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive. There was a shared delight at “finally being in the same room again” and it was different to the original training sessions we had last year. Delegates valued the chance to swap stories and realised they are companions on one synodal journey, whether serving a small rural cluster or a busy city parish. Many remarked that differences in scale fade when the same pastoral challenges — shortage of volunteers, ageing congregations, and outreach to youth — surface everywhere. The standout appreciation was the seamless link between the Eucharistic focus and the practical role of Pastoral Councils; participants felt this grounding clarified their mission and energised their planning. The prayerful atmosphere, strong speakers, and round-table format were repeatedly cited as key strengths.

“Prayer, planning, partnership—those three P’s are going straight into practice at our next meeting.”

“Patricia gave us permission to dream; Fr Billy showed us where to find the power to build.”

“The round tables turned strangers into partners.”



We are here to support you!



Ongoing Diocesan Support

Parishes are part of a diocesan family! Over the year, ongoing email contact will be maintained with the Chairperson and Secretary of each Parish Pastoral Council to keep them informed of developments at the Diocesan and National level and to offer Parish Pastoral Councils ideas and opportunities. Specific courses and programmes for formation and ministry will also be offered. Should a Parish Pastoral Council have specific needs or require specific support, please make contact. Visit www.anghailil.ie

Parish Pastoral Council Properly Constituted

It is recommended that each parish reviews its membership so that it is constituted in accordance with the Diocesan Norms for Parish Pastoral Councils and Parish Finance Committees. See www.galwaydiocese.ie and www.clonfertdiocese.ie

A Valuable Resource

At the gathering, all were given a copy of Patricia's book *Becoming a Pastoral Parish Council: How to make your Parish Pastoral Council really useful for the twenty-first century*, Messenger Publications, 2022. This is a valuable resource for all members of Parish Pastoral Councils.

Participating Parishes

Diocese of Galway, Kilmacduagh & Kilfenora:

An Spidéal, Ardahan, Kilchreest & Peterswell, Ballinderreen, Ballinfoyle, Ballybane, Ballyvaughan, Bearna & na Forbacha, Carron & New Quay, Castlegar, Cathedral, Claregalway, Clarinbridge, Craughwell, Ennistymon & Lahinch, Good Shepherd, Gort & Beagh, Kilbeacanty, Kilfenora, Killannin, Kinvara, Knocknacarra, Liscannor & Moymore, Lisdoonvarna & Kilshanny, Mervue, Moycullen, Oranmore, Oughterard, Renmore, Sacred Heart, Salthill, Shrile, St Augustine, St Mary's Claddagh.

Diocese of Clonfert: Abbey & Duniry, Aughrim & Kilconnell, Ballinakill & Derrybrien, Ballinasloe, Ballymacward & Gurteen, Cappataggle & Kilrickle, Clontuskert, Fahy & Quansboro, Fohenagh & Killure, Killimor, Kilconieran, Kilnadeema & Aille, Kiltormer & Lawrencetown, Kiltullagh, Killimordaly & Clooncagh, Leitrim & Ballydugan, Loughrea, Lusmagh, Meelick & Eyrecourt, Taughmaconnell, Tynagh & Killeen, Woodford & Looscaun.