

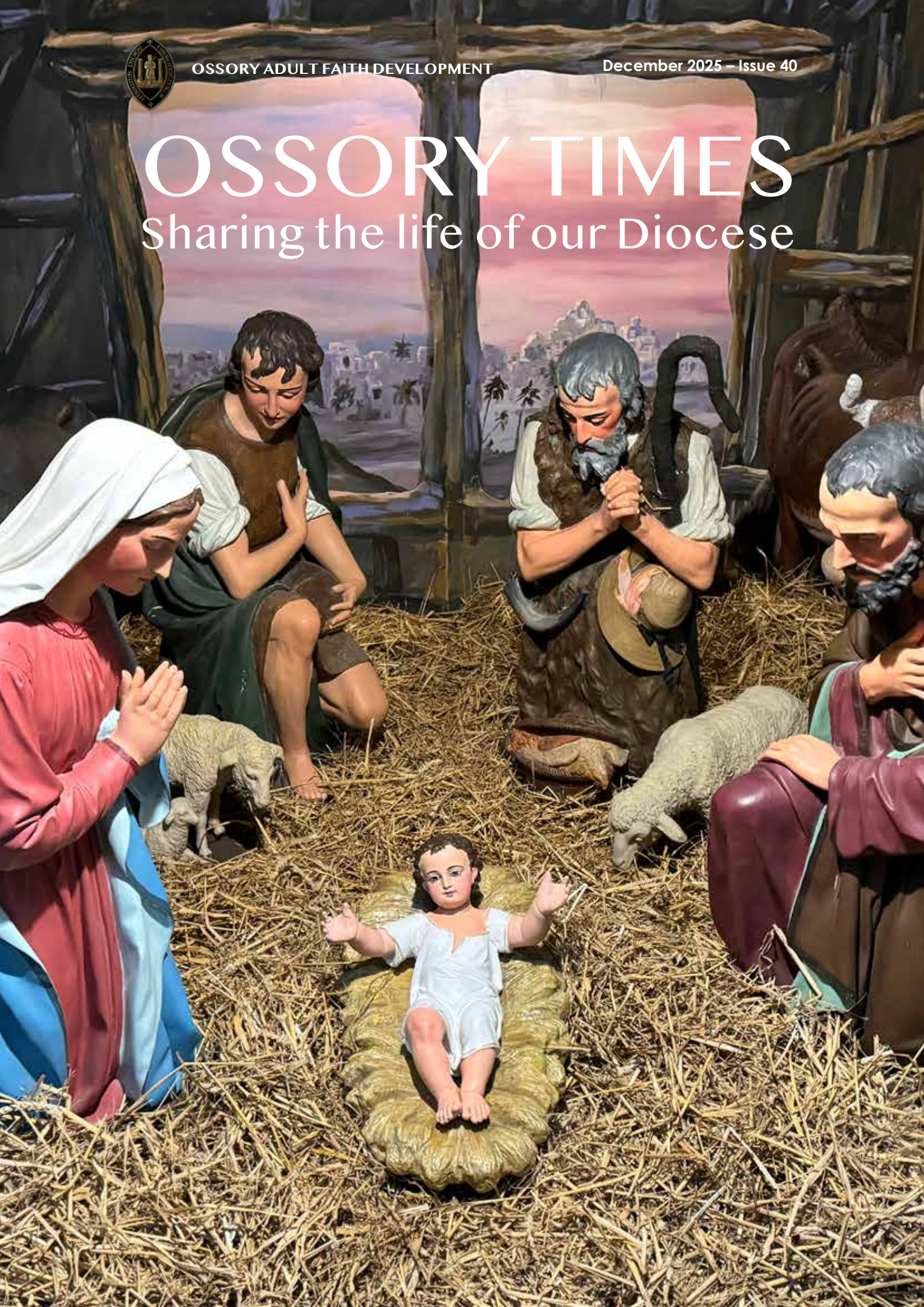


OSSORY ADULT FAITH DEVELOPMENT

December 2025 – Issue 40

OSSORY TIMES

Sharing the life of our Diocese





DIOCESE OF OSSORY

ST MARY'S CATHEDRAL

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2025/2026

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For further information contact Ossory Diocesan Office, James's Street, Kilkenny. Tel: 056 7762448

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

Editorial

Just before we stepped into Advent this year the news broke that Bishop Niall is to be appointed as Bishop of his native Raphoe. I am sure that news was both wonderfully received, in that he journeys home to continue his ministry where it first started, but also somewhat difficult in that it involves a new start albeit in a familiar place. Little did we know when Fr Kieran O'Shea preached at the Ordination Mass for Bishop Niall that the words of the song he quoted would resonate so true - "I've just dropped in to see you all, I'll only stay awhile" or how the next line of that song now resonates in a new way for Bishop Niall - "I'm happy to be back again, And greet you big and small, For there's no place else on earth just like, The homes of Donegal". We wish him well as he undertakes this new ministry - may the Lord who called him continue to sustain him. May the Holy Spirit guide him.

For Ossory that brings change - and we can choose to see change as an occasion of difficulty or opportunity. As I write these words on Gaudate Sunday I am, with seasonal hope, believing that it is an opportunity for the Diocese to reflect on where we are, what we need, and what the Lord might want for us now. We are not masters of our own future - we, like John the Baptist, today are called to see the shoots of hope everywhere in our midst. In this time of consultation for a new Bishop we pray that the Holy Spirit, which is at work in our midst continually, will stay promoting and guiding. We, as a people of faith, trust that the Lord's desire for us will be right for us at this time.

This is a time of change in so many ways in our parishes and dioceses, an Advent talk from these weeks reflected that fact and it is captured in these pages, it is also a time of continuity as we celebrate 800 years of a Dominican presence. There are always signs of great hope in our midst - with inspiring Retreats for those preparing to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation and Godly Play for those preparing to celebrate First Holy Communion - this next generation reminding us of a future yet to unfold for us, a new Baptismal Team, the ongoing Synodal work, a rural school welcoming students with special needs, the new Ministry of Catechist, and so much more.

As always the pages of the *Ossory Times* try to capture a small part of the great life of our Diocese. These pages provide but a small insight into how the Spirit moves among us - we trust in that Spirit now in the months ahead. That is the action of a people of faith.

I am delighted then to welcome you to the latest edition of the *Ossory Times*. As always I hope you enjoy this publication. Comments, suggestions and contributions are most welcome for future editions. Articles or advertisements for upcoming events or of recent events, can be sent to:

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**Letter to the Priests, Religious and Lay Faithful of the Diocese of Ossory
on my appointment as Bishop of Raphoe,
13th November 2025.**

The news of my appointment as Bishop of Raphoe, my home diocese, means that my time as Bishop of Ossory has been all too brief. My heart is filled with gratitude to God for the gift of these past three years, and gratitude to you, the priests, Religious and lay faithful of this diocese, who welcomed me so warmly and shared with me the life of faith that has long been the mainstay of this Church.

When I first arrived in Ossory, I came as a stranger. I leave as one who has been enriched by your friendship, your faith and your witness. The Diocese of Ossory is blessed with a remarkable sense of community - a faith that is lived in parishes, schools, families and countless works of service. I have seen that faith in the celebration of the Eucharist, in parish gatherings, in the care of the vulnerable, sick and elderly, in the commitment of our Catholic schools, in the welcome extended to newcomers, and in the tireless service of priests who give of themselves day in and day out.

I want to thank the priests of Ossory most especially. Your dedication, often in demanding circumstances, has been

a source of deep inspiration to me. You have carried the burdens of pastoral ministry with courage, patience and good humour. I have been privileged to pray with you, to listen to you and to learn from you. Thank you for your kindness to me and for the faithfulness with which you continue to serve your people.

I also want to express a word of sincere gratitude to those who have worked alongside me daily - the staff in the bishop's office and those who diligently ensure that the many tasks of diocesan life are carried out with care and professionalism. Your support and advice have been a steady help to me in more ways than you may realise, and I am deeply grateful. I also wish to acknowledge the many lay people who have contributed their professionalism, time and talent to the various diocesan bodies, councils and committees. Your insight and generosity have enriched the life of the diocese and strengthened the bonds of collaboration that are so essential to the Church's mission today.

To the religious sisters, priests and brothers who have contributed so much, often

quietly and unseen, I offer my heartfelt thanks. Your prayer and your service are part of the deep spiritual fabric of this diocese.

And to the lay faithful - to those who lead, teach, organise, volunteer and accompany others in so many ways - I express my sincere appreciation. I want especially to acknowledge all who serve their parishes and pastoral areas so generously with their time and talent: in parish pastoral councils, finance councils, ministries and the many other ways in which people pull together to serve their communities. Thanks, too, to all involved both in the annual Diocesan Lourdes Pilgrimage and in youth ministry. The future of the Church will depend in no small way on the faith and generosity of lay men and women who take seriously their baptismal call to mission.

It is no secret that the Church in Ireland is living through a time of profound transition. The questions being asked at national level about the future shape and structure of our dioceses are not merely administrative - they are pastoral and spiritual. They invite us to consider how best to serve the Gospel in a society that is changing rapidly. Numbers and boundaries will not define the future of the Church - faith will. What matters most is that we remain open to the Spirit, willing to collaborate and ready to place Christ at the centre of all we do.

Here in Ossory, that spirit of renewal and collaboration is already well advanced. The work of reorganising the diocese into pastoral areas has been carried forward with generosity, realism and faith. I have seen priests and people embracing this process, not as a burden, but as an opportunity to shape together the Church's mission for the years ahead. I pray that the first steps that the Diocese is now making in terms of introducing the Ministry of Catechist may be supported and that the project in time will prove to be a great blessing. I am hopeful that what is emerging in Ossory can be

a model of how the Church in Ireland might respond creatively and faithfully to the needs of our time.

During my time here, I have seen many signs of renewal: lay people taking on new roles in parish life; priests working together with creativity and generosity; communities re-imagining how faith can be handed on to a new generation. These are seeds of hope. I am convinced that the Church in Ossory, with its long history of learning, worship and service, has the capacity to navigate this time of change with faith and courage.

As I return now to the Diocese of Raphoe, I do so carrying with me a deep affection for the people, priests and religious of Ossory. You have taught me much about what it means to be Church - about patience, perseverance and the quiet fidelity that keeps the flame of faith alive. For all of this and more, I thank you.

Please know that you will remain in my prayers. I will continue to ask the Lord to bless this diocese - its priests, its people, its religious, its schools, its parishes and pastoral areas - and to guide you as you discern the path ahead. I pray, too, for my successor, whoever he may be, that he may be received with the same warmth and generosity that you have shown to me, and that he may find here the same spirit of faith and friendship that I have known.

May the Lord who began the good work in us bring it to completion. May he bless the Diocese of Ossory in the years to come and may he grant us all the grace to walk together in faith, with hope in our hearts and Christ as our companion on the journey. He is, as my episcopal motto reminds us, truly 'Christ Jesus our hope' (1Tim. 1:1).

Go raibh mile maith agaibh, agus go mbeannai Dia daoibh go leir. With every blessing,

+ Niall Coll,
Bishop of Ossory.

Published in the *Donegal News* 17 November 2025

On Thursday morning, St Johnston native Niall Coll was appointed Bishop of Raphoe, returning from the Diocese of Ossory where he had served as Bishop since 2023.

Following the announcement, he spoke of being “hugely sad” to be leaving the Ossory Diocese, while also “humbled” to be returning home as Bishop of Raphoe, his native diocese.

“I am delighted to be coming home to my friends and my family and to be nearer to my mother.

“This is the diocese where I was born and where I was brought up.”

Bishop Coll, the eldest of four children, was born in St Johnston to Willie and Kathleen Coll.

Addressing the packed pews, he paid tribute to his parents, both formative influences in his life and priesthood.

His father sadly passed away two years ago, but his mother was present at the special ceremony. She beamed with pride as she watched her son announced as Bishop on the altar of St Eunan’s Cathedral, where he was ordained almost 40 years ago.

In 1989, having completed his studies, Bishop Coll was appointed chaplain and teacher at St Eunan’s College.

He spoke warmly about his pride and gratitude in returning to his roots, and it was clear from the crowd – filled with family, friends, neighbours and pupils from local schools – that the people of the diocese shared that feeling.

“It was great to see students from St

Eunan’s College, where I myself was a student and my first appointment after ordination was in this very cathedral 37 years ago.

“My deepest feeling at the moment is the gratitude that I’m coming home and that I am with my own people.”

Bishop Coll also served as chaplain in Pobalscoil Na Rossan and curate in the parish of Dungloe.

During his ministry he has spent much time in his native Donegal having also served as parish priest of both Drumholm and Tawnawilly.

In 2023, Bishop Coll was ordained Bishop of Ossory.

He spoke of the people of Ossory, describing them as “very welcoming” and “kind”, and reflected on the bittersweet feeling of having to uproot so soon.

“I thank them from the very bottom of my heart for their kindness and their faith and their support.

“I wish whoever succeeds me every blessing,” he added.

Despite the sadness of departing, Bishop Coll said he is deeply grateful to be back among his own community. He described being greeted by dozens of priests on his return to Donegal on Thursday morning and said that knowing each of them personally will be a great advantage in his ministry.

“The many people who greeted me at the door know me or they know some of my family and that was encouraging,” he said.

... my hope is simply to serve it well.

St Patrick's College, Maynooth appoints new President



Rev Dr Michael Shortall has been appointed as President of St Patrick's College, Maynooth. The Trustees of the college formally installed Rev Shortall as president at their December meeting. Rev Shortall has been interim President of the college for the past year.

Fr Michael is originally from Kilkenny, he initially studied politics and philosophy at University College, Dublin, completing a Masters in 1995. Intent on pursuing life in the priesthood, Michael entered Clonliffe College, the then seminary for the Archdiocese of Dublin, graduating with a Bachelor's in Divinity and was ordained to the priesthood in 1998. Having served as a curate in parishes in Dublin, Michael then moved to Rome where he obtained

his Doctorate in Sacred Theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University in 2006. In that same year he was appointed as Lecturer in Moral Theology at St Patrick's College, Maynooth. Fr Michael has since served in a number of senior roles in the college, including Registrar, Dean of Theology, and Dean of Postgraduate Studies.

A devotee of lifelong learning, he holds numerous post graduate qualifications in education, leadership, and medical law. He has also served as research fellow and occasional lecturer at different European universities, including Durham and the European Network of Catholic Universities.

Commenting on his appointment, Fr Michael remarked: "I am grateful for the trust placed in me. This community has shaped me for nearly twenty years, and my hope is simply to serve it well. The task ahead isn't mine alone; it will be carried by staff, students, and all who care for this college. Together we can continue the work entrusted to us."



**Words of welcome to the
Pre-Synodal Assembly of the Synodal Pathway of the Catholic Church in Ireland,
Lyraeth Hotel, Kilkenny, 18 October 2025
Most Rev. Niall Coll, Bishop of Ossory**

Kilkenny is well known for its prowess in hurling: no elaboration is needed. Kilkenny City, as it is once again today, is long experienced as an important locus in the life of the Catholic Church in Ireland. Two earlier examples include: first, it was here that my innovative predecessor, Bishop Peter Birch of Ossory, following the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, championed the new direction set in *Gaudium et Spes* by advancing the social gospel not least in terms of special education of both children and adults at a time before the State took much of an interest in the provision of social services.

Second, it was here, some three hundred years earlier, that the Confederation of Kilkenny met in urgent circumstances in October 1642 and it remained in existence until the fall of the city to Oliver Cromwell in March 1650. Historians remind us that the Confederation constituted both what might be termed the last Home Rule parliament and independent government in Ireland until the 1920s. Kilkenny people are rightly proud of this aspect of their heritage and one of the city's principal thoroughfares is named Parliament Street to honour this important milestone in the history of our country.

Having reminded you of the pedigree of this city and diocese, I would like to welcome you to this Pre-Synodal Assembly of the Synodal Pathway of the Catholic

Church in Ireland. Representatives from parishes, dioceses, religious orders and lay associations from all over the country are gathered here today to take the next steps in the synodal journey so close to the heart of the late Pope Francis which the Irish Episcopal Conference began in March 2021.

Recent reflections following his death have underlined that the pontificate of Francis signalled a deeper reception of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council reflected in a paradigm shift towards a synodal church, with encouragement to a more open culture of debate, discussion and discernment within the Church. Our presence here today means that there are voices in Ireland attuned to the need to read the 'signs of the times' and anxious to follow the direction for renewal and reform that Francis charted, with its call to collegiality, synodality and a reanimated ecclesiology and theology of laity symbolised by the image of the inverted pyramid.

In inviting me to speak this morning Fr Declan Hurley chair of the National Synodal Team asked me to select a few key points from the short theological paper written for the purposes of our conference today by the Ossory priest and Boston College theologian, Monsignor Liam Bergin. The article entitled 'Baptised in Christ: Reborn for Mission'

aims to ground what the synodal process is about here and throughout the world in the renewed emphasis on baptism that was sparked by the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and is now taking flame, hopefully, in the process of synodality across the Catholic world.

Aptly, Fr Bergin underlines that deep reflection on the sacrament of baptism beyond its ritual celebration - albeit so important in our family lives - has not been a priority traditionally in the imagination of Irish Catholics. Instead, as he points out, the emphasis was on Mass, and that is, I must say, perfectly understandable, the Eucharist being 'the source and summit of the Christian life' according to Vatican II.

So, the Mass has long been regarded as central to Irish Catholic identity and experience, and vocations to the priesthood too to ensure the celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments. I suppose the centrality of both Eucharist and priesthood were long highlighted because of how both were the subject of intense dispute following the Reformation and in the face of penal persecution.

Fr Bergin is keen to remind us of the importance of receiving a richer theology of baptism and this leads him to include a welcome local reference in terms of the new baptismal font in our St Mary's Cathedral here in Kilkenny. Octagonal in shape it reminds us that, following the account in Genesis 1 of seven days of creation, early Christians considered the eighth day as the day of the new creation into which the catechumen (the candidate) is baptised. And the strikingly designed font and its prominent positioning near the sanctuary invites a more lively celebration of this great truth of the sacrament of baptism.

In his wide-ranging article, Fr Bergin applauds the decision of the Second Vatican Council 'to put an end to the pyramidal vision of the Church and to assert that all members of the Church are

equal by reason of their baptism, prior to any subsequent differentiation'.

Baptism, Fr Bergin, drawing from the writings of Pope John Paul II, goes on to say, gives all a shared, if differentiated, responsibility for the life and mission of the Church, and calls baptised and ordained to work together. All baptised members of the Church participate together in the prophetic or teaching office, in the priestly or sanctifying office, and in the kingly or governing office of Christ. This participation in the threefold mission of Christ is not delegated from the ordained ministry but "finds its source in the anointing of baptism, its further development in confirmation and its realization and dynamic sustenance in the Holy Eucharist" (Christifideles Laici 14).

All of this means that in our churches on the typical Sunday, 'There are prophets and teachers, athletes and healers; there are labourers and miracle workers, poets and florists; there are linguists and singers, listeners and sharers; there are leaders and dreamers, pioneers and settlers. No one gift is more important than another, no one part of the body takes precedence over another. If one part refuses to function or is impeded in its rightful operation, then the whole body seizes up. Instead of boldly proclaiming the Kingdom, it limps blindly along, wracked by cancerous divisions. There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit. Within the diversity there is an essential unity.' (Liam Begin)

Speaking in my own voice, I am delighted to note that the synodality process is well underway in Ireland and I know that the Irish bishops want it to take root, blossom and thrive. This clearly means that we need to do more to engage with, listen to and persuade our people and priests of the possibilities for real reform and renewal in our ecclesial life.

Truth be told, committed Irish Catholics are aware that in our highly secular, multicultural and multireligious society,

that we need to build up from the ground a new way of being church, one which will seek to blend the old faith and, where possible, the new ground of contemporary Irish society in a new organic synthesis.

At the heart of this work will be the retrieval of the importance of baptismal identity. Two practical ways of pointing to this would be for parishes and pastoral areas throughout the country to establish programmes to welcome and help people, who, thought formally baptised, were given a poor upbringing in the faith to dig deeper and thus be better evangelised. Hopefully, with God's grace, this would invite them into a deeper participation in the life of the Church. Second, and in continuity with

what I just said, the more multicultural nature of Irish society will mean that many parishes and pastoral areas will need to offer Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA) programmes for adults who are coming to the faith and seeking baptism.

Finally, it is my most earnest prayer that the synodal journey on which we have embarked, and which is at the heart of what we shall do today, will be of critical importance to the renewal of the life of the Church in Ireland (and beyond) in the years to come. May history show that this meeting today in Kilkenny was a great impetus on that journey.

Go dtuga an Tiarna dúinn dóchas, leanúnachas agus muinín san obair seo atá a ghlacadh idir lámh againn.

The story behind the new Logo

When the Irish Synodal Pathway embarked on the journey to renew its visual identity, the invitation to tender called for a logo that would be theologically rich, spiritually resonant, and distinctly Irish. The vision was to create something timeless yet contemporary, a symbol that would express unity, participation, and mission while remaining open, inclusive, and grounded in the Christian and Celtic heritage of Ireland.

In the early stages of development, the design team explored many of the visual ideas proposed in the tender. However, as the process evolved, it became clear that including too many elements risked creating an illustration rather than a logo. At the heart of the final design lies Saint Brigid's Cross, a symbol deeply woven into both Irish culture and Christian tradition. Within its familiar form, the designer traced a pathway, a visual metaphor for our shared synodal journey. The lines move in and out, suggesting openness, dialogue, and movement, a Church that listens, learns, and walks together. This sense of the pathway reflects the inclusive nature of synodality, a journey that welcomes all and remains open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.



The cross itself preserves the Christian foundation of the Synodal Pathway, while its geometric simplicity conveys modernity and adaptability. The use of two shades of green, in both the image and the wording, roots the design in the Irish landscape, with a gentle echo of life, renewal, and growth.

Importantly, we made a deliberate decision not to use human figures in the design. We recognised that any depiction of people, however well-intentioned, might risk excluding others. Instead, the cross and its flowing pathways invite everyone to see themselves within it.

In the end, the new logo embodies an Irish expression of the universal call to communion, participation, and mission. It is both rooted and forward looking, grounded in faith and alive with movement, holding tradition and transformation together in an unfolding journey.

Synodality has consistently affirmed: that “synodality is the path that God expects of the Church in the third millennium”

International gathering for Synod Teams and Participatory Bodies

Diocesan Synod Team



As the international gathering for Synod Teams and Participatory Bodies approached in October (24th-26th) those of us who are part of the Diocesan Synod Team here in Ossory were delighted to also be part of the National Gathering for Synodal Teams which was held in our Diocese on the weekend of October 18th. This day was the next step on the National Synodal journey - a journey that resonates with, and yet moves alongside,

the international synodal journey onto which we were called by Pope Francis.

The gathering in Kilkenny was a truly positive one. It was heartening to hear from delegates from around the country as they reflected on their own experience of trying to be synodal - trying to include the voice, opinions, concerns and hopes of all that they have encountered in their local church. There was tensions



too - but that in itself is to be welcomed, as without it, it would not be real: were we, as diocesan synod teams present on that day, really reflective of the Ireland in which we find ourselves; was the number of 'priorities identified' to many to take seriously or were some other serious ones forgotten or ignored. Questions were asked and options were shared. The music, prayer and reflection that framed the day ensuring that these were really conversations in the Spirit - conversations attempting to listen to the whispers of God in our midst.

Some days later some of our Diocesan Synod team headed to Rome to be part of the invitation to gather for the International gathered in the Vatican. We carried with us not merely the memory of these recent years of synodal conversations but also now, fresh in our memory, those conversations of that most recent gathering.

It was heartening to meet other Irish teams in the airport as we all were heading in one direction (albeit possible with different focuses/priorities). In

travelling there we earnestly carried with us the voices of fellow parishioners, clergy, religious, and the many lay faithful from our own Irish dioceses - voices that were shaped by consultation, listening, prayer, and at times honest struggles when we met in these recent years. What we encountered over those days was, in reality, a deeply encouraging confirmation that this journey, although on occasion demanding, is shared across the universal Church.

From the outset, the Jubilee made visible something that the Synod on Synodality has consistently affirmed: that "synodality is the path that God expects of the Church in the third millennium" (Synod of Bishops, Address for the Opening of the Synodal Process). This was not simply a gathering about synodality, it was an experience of synodality lived. In our encounters with groups from every part of the world - we could readily see the resonances of issues that were coming to the fore. Although our context were vastly different, we each shared in groups with people from Latin America, South Sudan where war

rages, North America, various European and Asian countries and far beyond.

A defining feature of the Jubilee was these very groups and the sustained use of "Conversations in the Spirit", a practice explicitly commended throughout the synodal process. These conversations were marked by prayer, silence, and attentive listening, reflecting the Synod's insistence that "the method of dialogue is not a technique, but a spiritual and ecclesial attitude" (Instrumentum Laboris).

In small groups with participants from different continents, we shared experiences of synodal life that were honest and sometimes challenging. Yet there was a striking absence of defensiveness. Instead, there was a shared openness to that "mutual listening, where everyone has something to learn" (Final Document).

The encounter with the Holy Father, Pope Leo, was a moment of particular encouragement. Both the formal and the informal encounter. The latter first as a group of us slipped out for a coffee from the Paul VI hall were asked to wait for a minute - and in that minute Pope Leo was driven past us, about 20 people, just feet away - a surreal glimpse into the life of the Vatican and its many moving parts as Pope Leo was returning from another synodal gathering that was at that time being held in St Peter's Square. But then a return to the formal encounter - The words of Pope Leo continually echoed the Synod's consistent emphasis that synodality is not an optional project or a temporary phase. Rather, it is now integral to the Church's identity.

In answering questions from representatives from the various continents he spoke of the need for what the Synod has described as a "conversion of relationships", reminding synodal teams that participatory bodies only bear fruit when they are animated by real trust, humility, and a deep mutual

respect. "Synodality requires patient work on relationships, healed from mistrust and polarisation" (Final document).

What distinguished this Jubilee from many international ecclesial gatherings was its explicitly spiritual character. The rhythm of the days was shaped by prayer, liturgy, and pilgrimage. Passing through the Holy Door together in St Peter's Basilica was a particularly powerful moment early on the second day. As synodal teams, we crossed that threshold not as experts or representatives of church structures, but as pilgrims seeking renewal and conversion for ourselves and those we carried with us in prayer.

The Marian prayer vigil in St Peter's Square also offered a moment of stillness and unity. Praying with the Church from across the world, we were reminded that synodality is not something we invent, but something we receive and grow into, trusting in God's faithfulness.

On the Sunday morning as we finished up - we came together in St Peter's Basilica once more - this time for the celebration of Eucharist - thanksgiving a real moment of recognising where we are as church and how good it is to be here.

At this Mass in his homily Pope Leo reminded us of what is at the heart of synodality "No one should impose his or her own ideas; we must all listen to one another. No one is excluded; we are all called to participate. No one possesses the whole truth; we must all humbly seek it and seek it together.". What is synodality people from our Diocese often ask as we invite them together - put simply it is this - listening to each other - our hopes, frustrations and dreams - so that we might together figure out what is it that God wants of us as Church today.

They were busy days but truly synodal in that we were called to listen as much as speak - to recognise that we have not yet figured it out and that is ok. After all we are on a journey not at a destination.

Our presence accompanied by our prayer is a fountain of consolation and support for those who weep.

Ties of friendship and affection

Albert McDonnell



‘The ties of friendship and affection which knit us as one throughout our lives do not unravel with death.’

That sentence is from the prayer we offer as we welcome a deceased person into Church. It is my favourite prayer from our funeral liturgy. These words portray the reality of bereavement while uniting

hope with grief, faith and loss, gratitude and intercession.

The celebration of the funeral rite for a Christian is rich in beauty. We begin in the home, hospital or place of death. Family and close friends gather around their loved one, perhaps holding hands as they accompany him or her in that great, final journey from life to eternity. Tears, silence, prayer, bewilderment, hope, memories, love, grief all come together

as we live that moment which we always knew would come, but we could never fully prepare for. It is a truly sacred time to be with a person as he/she breathes their last and returns to the loving God from whom they came.

The sacred enriches the practical. The circle widens to include neighbours, friends, extended family and the caring professions. Arrangements need to be made, people have to be told. We are lucky in that our undertakers are local, kind, professional and appropriate. People shake hands while the words 'I'm sorry' are repeated over and over. Memories are recalled and shared. Simple words and gestures help. People taking the trouble to interrupt their normal lives to spend time with grieving families, makes a difference. Sometimes a cousin, neighbour or friend with shrewd and loving instincts will take over the running of the home for those days. Everyone has permission to cry, adults alongside children, men together with women.

'Reposing' is a lovely word. The deceased repose. He/she, surrounded by their loved ones, rests. Where possible, reposing at home is especially poignant. A final return to the home that previously was filled with his/her presence, voice, laughter and the bits and pieces of ordinary living. Next the deceased is brought to the Church. The coffin is sprinkled with holy water at the door as we recall that our deceased loved one became a child of God through baptism. 'In the waters of baptism, they died with Christ and rose with him in new life. May they now share eternal glory.' The lingering farewell continues as our loved one spends their last night in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament while family and friends return home.

The funeral Mass is the high point of our Christian funeral celebration. People of faith are joined by other members of the community in this solemn moment. The requiem Mass recalls Christ's victory over sin and death. We entrust the deceased

to God's tender mercy and compassion. We thank the Lord for the gift of the person's life and the blessings that so many received through being part of that life. 'We give you thanks for all the blessings which you bestowed upon [the deceased] in this life, they are signs to us of your goodness and of our fellowship with the saints in Christ'. We pray for the bereaved, for the members of the circle of love and care that surrounded the deceased person in life. Our presence accompanied by our prayer is a fountain of consolation and support for those who weep.

An especially beautiful aspect of our funeral liturgy is the reverence and respect reserved for the body of the deceased. Before death, if possible, the person is anointed with sacred oil as the sacrament of the sick is celebrated. At the reposing, people pause to offer a silent prayer by the coffin or perhaps make the sign of the cross on the deceased's forehead. At the funeral Mass, the remains are placed at the centre of the church facing the altar. The paschal candle, symbol of the resurrection, is positioned next to the coffin. The coffin is sprinkled with holy water and incensed as an expression of respect for the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer, presence, song, gesture, symbol, silence and words all combine to lead us towards consolation and raise our hopes as we celebrate a Christian funeral. The involvement of the family in choosing and leading scripture readings and sacred music, prayers of the faithful, sometimes selecting symbols, unites liturgy and life. Our funeral rite concludes as we gather around the deceased, one last time to place their mortal remains in the soil. Ties of friendship and affection endure.

'Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord. And let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. May their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.'



It is an exciting time for the school, working towards new goals...

News from Glenmore National School

Laura Kelly

On Thursday 20th November, the teachers, staff and pupils of Glenmore National School were delighted to welcome Minister of State for Special Education and Inclusion, Michael Moynihan for a ceremonial opening of our new classrooms. The minister, local TD Peter 'Chap' Cleere and local Councillor, Jenny Catt Slattery were welcomed by the senior members of the school's student's council who brought the minister and his colleagues on a tour of the school. They visited the mainstream classes, met the pupils and teachers, and then visited the newly renovated section of the school that now caters for twelve children with autism.

The school opened two new autism classes in September 2025 in an effort to cater for the lack of school places available for children with autism in the local area and beyond. Both classes are full to capacity, with some of the pupils travelling Waterford and farther each day. Our school could be considered unique as it a rural school with 4 mainstream classes that has now opened two autism classes together. It is a clear indication of the need and demand for school places for children

with autism in the area. We are delighted that the children have settled extremely well into a great routine in Glenmore NS. The children are engaging in integration and reverse integration between autism classes and mainstream class. This allows for wonderful learning opportunities for all children, both academically and socially.

Work was carried out over the summer break to modify two existing classes and some smaller rooms to create suitable learning environment for children with autism. Under the guidance of consultant engineer Nicholas Mernagh, John Gray Construction and associated contractors worked quickly and professionally over the eight weeks of the summer break to get the area ready for the start of the school year.

The addition of the classes has been an outstanding success to date and has had such a positive impact on the entire school community. In Glenmore NS there has always been a strong culture and ethos for inclusivity and creating a sense of belonging. The addition of the autism classes has further enhanced these. Positivity and inclusivity go hand in Glenmore N.S, our children experience both. We are very fortunate that due to

our small class sizes, all the children know each other really well; relationships are being formed for all pupils throughout the school.

Glenmore NS has evolved, with support and encouragement from its Board of Management, chaired by Fr Tom O Toole. The school has had a new lease of life, brought on by the addition of the new autism classes. This has brought together the hardworking and loyal existing staff, parents and pupils with new pupils, new parents, new teachers and staff members.

It is an exciting time for the school, working towards new goals, facing

new challenges and seeking out new opportunities.

Leading a primary school certainly comes with many challenges. It is undeniable that there is constant pressure to meet the expectations from parents, the demands from the Department of Education, the NCSE and to cope with financial pressures. However, as principal of Glenmore National School, I feel privileged to have been part of the school during our most recent evolution and I look forward to what lies ahead.

Ar scáth a chéile, a mhaireann na daoine - The future certainly looks bright for Glenmore National School.



BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT
50 YEARS OF SERVICE
1975-2025

Catholic Schools – Normal Lives, Called to Holiness

“Holiness does not mean performing extraordinary things, but doing ordinary things with love and faith.”

— Pope Francis on Blessed Carlo Acutis

Introduction

Catholic Schools Week 2026 celebrates the extraordinary call to holiness in the midst of ordinary life. Inspired by Pope Francis’s reflection on Blessed Carlo Acutis—soon to be canonised as the first millennial saint—this year’s theme invites pupils, teachers, families, and parishes to explore the call to holiness as something both universal and accessible. Holiness is not for a few, but for all; not reserved for religious professionals or mystics, but for every student, teacher, parent, (and grandparent!) living each day in friendship with Jesus Christ.

Catholic schools exist to form individuals who know that their lives have a purpose and a calling. This year’s theme, “Normal Lives, Called to Holiness,” resonates with the central conviction that education is a path not only to knowledge and maturity but to sainthood.

“Each of us is called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do.”

— Gaudete et Exsultate, 14

For how long now have we prayed for peace

Bondi Beach

Dermot Ryan

The world was again deeply troubled when we awoke here in Ireland on the morning of Sunday 14th December to the news of the unfolding events at Bondi Beach. For the Christian this was Guadate Sunday - a day to remind us of the great hope that our faith brings, For the Jewish people that were among those gathered on that beach it was part of the festival of Hanukkah - a festival that celebrates the triumph of light over darkness - a festival of religious freedom. It is a celebration marking the overcoming of oppression. Surely these facts alone remind us of all that unite us as a people of faith.

That famed beach should be a place associated simply with happiness, fun, relaxation and the ordinary joy that permeates everyday life. Instead, with the actions of a few, it has been transformed into a site of terror and grief. As a people of faith "we weep with those who weep" (Rom 12:15). Every human life is sacred, irreducible, and willed into existence by God.

Pope Francis had repeatedly warned against the numbing effect of modern violence. Speaking on an apostolic journey to Columbia in 2017 he noted that "every act of violence committed against a human being is a wound in humanity's flesh; every violent death diminishes us as people". Violence lessens us - it reduces us. It is an affront to the image of God that we each are - and all people of faith, and people of all faiths are called to hold fast to this.

In his visit to Assisi for an Address for the World Day of Prayer for Peace in 2016 Pope Francis clearly noted that "the one who calls upon God's name to justify terrorism, violence, and war does not follow God's path" He couldn't have been clearer going on to say that "war in the name of religion becomes a war against religion itself." To those of us who watched on

as these events unfolded this is self-evident. But sadly, in our world today, for some this is not the case. That which should bring unity - is a reason for discord, that which should bring peace - is a reason for violence, that which should allow us see the face of God in others - is a reason to hate blindly.

Recently when ending his three day trip to Lebanon it was widely reported that Pope Leo evocatively demanded that "Peace cannot be built on the ruins of hospitals or the corpses of children". Dramatic words spoken to underline the stark and significant times in which we live. In his homily on the First Sunday of Advent in Turkey as part of that same trip he noted reflecting on the passage from the prophet Isaiah "This is how he describes it: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Is 2:4). How urgent this call is for us today! How great the need for peace, unity and reconciliation around us,".

For how long now have we prayed for peace in Ukraine, in South Sudan, in Palestine, Gaza and the Holy Land. For how long have we lamented the rise in gang violence in Haiti and Mexico. For how long have we watched in horror as peoples are displaced from their homes and their safety by the theatres of conflict. For how long now have we stood in shock that the places of our everyday lives - schools, hospitals, shops, streets and beaches have been turned into moments of chaos - theatres of fear, points of devastation.

For a people of faith we must continue to storm heaven that one day we all will see with the eyes of God - the beauty of the other, the image of God, a brother and sister of another faith. Until then we carry each other in prayer, and we weep with those who weep.

Their role is not to test or interrogate families, but to meet them where they are and to open a space where faith can be spoken about, rediscovered, or simply nurtured

A City Baptismal Team: Returning Baptism to a Moment of Encounter



Dermot Ryan

In our Diocese, as with any, the baptism of children remains one of the most frequent and significant points of contact between young families and the Church.

Reflecting on this, and in response to the call of the Irish Synodal Pathway to

explore in greater depth the Sacrament of Baptism, a new city baptismal team is been established, with the specific task of accompanying families who present their children for baptism and helping them to rediscover the depth, beauty, and rich meaning of the sacrament they are requesting.

This new team, the result of some months planning by the city pastoral area, emerges from the belief that Baptism is not merely a ceremony to be arranged, or a moment to be had but like all sacraments it is an encounter with Christ and a deepening of our relationship with him. This new team will attempt to ensure that preparation for Baptism is not reduced merely to administrative efficiency, but that this preparation becomes a genuine moment of evangelisation, real welcome, and the planing of another seed of faith for the families.

To prepare the team for this important ministry, a structured programme of formation was arranged by the Adult Faith Development Group, over three evenings at St Kieran's College.

The first was delivered by Mgr Enda Murphy, Capo Ufficio at the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in Rome. On this night, via a video link, Mgr Enda explored a rich but accessible reflection on Baptism in the New Testament.

Drawing from the Gospels and the writings of St Paul, Enda explored baptism as incorporation into Christ's death and resurrection, entry into the Body of Christ, and participation in the life of the Trinity.

He highlighted how baptism in the early Church was inseparable from conversion, community, and discipleship. This biblical grounding reminded participants that baptism is never a private family affair, but the action of the church community by which she receives new members into the life of faith.

The second evening was led by, our own, Mgr Liam Bergin, Co-Director of the Catholic Education and Theology Minor at Boston College. This evening, by means of a pre-recorded session, focused on the rich symbolism of the sacrament itself.

Through a careful exploration of the signs and gestures of baptism - water, oil, light, white garment, and the spoken word - Liam demonstrated how the liturgy itself proclaims theology. These symbols speak powerfully not only to the mind but to the human heart.

Particular attention was given to how baptismal teams can help parents to appreciate the meaning of these signs, so that the ritual is experienced not as something obscure or routine, but as something deeply personal and educational.

The third evening was presented by Fr Dermot Ryan, who offered a theology attempting to emphasise how sacraments are in essence moments of encounter and how it is that the ministry of the Baptismal team is at the service of this. He reflected on how contemporary pastoral practice can sometimes unintentionally separate sacramental celebration from lived faith - bringing sacraments to those, as Michael Paul Gallagher noted "Not yet ripe for sacraments".

Baptismal teams, then, are uniquely placed to bridge this gap by offering hospitality, listening, encounter and dialogue.

Their role is not to test or interrogate families, but to meet them where they are and to open a space where faith can be spoken about, rediscovered, or simply nurtured. In this way, preparation for baptism becomes an encounter with the Church as well as with the person of Christ.

It was wonderful to see people from the city parishes come together - the energy and enthusiasm for this ministry clearly evident as those present are keen to help families encounter Christ and feel welcomed in the faith communities that are their parishes.

"what matters most to Christians is this: regardless of where a person was born or what passport they carry, they are our neighbour"

Give me a crash course in ... Immigration



MORALITY MATTERS

Michael Shortall

It's Christmas time, as you know. Lights and decorations are up. We place a crib in our churches and homes.

We know the scene so well that we hardly notice how unsettling it really is. A young couple far from home. There is no place for them to stay. And a child is born only because of the welcome of strangers.

One of the big issues people seem to be talking about at the moment is immigration. It's hard to avoid the conversations.

That's true. Immigration is no longer something distant or abstract. It is now part of everyday life in towns, villages, parishes, and schools across Ireland. And for many people, those conversations are not simple.

That's exactly it. I feel torn. I want to be compassionate, but I also see real pressures. Housing is scarce. Services feel

stretched. Sometimes it feels like things have changed very quickly.

That tension is important to acknowledge. The Irish Bishops wrote about this issue in their recent pastoral letter. If you would like to read it please go the Irish Bishops' website and search for A Hundred Thousand Welcomes? Pastoral Letter on Immigration.

They begin by acknowledging what you say. Ireland's tradition of hospitality "faces challenges due to rising immigration, which has exposed longstanding societal issues like housing, homelessness, and gaps in social services". These pressures are real, and people feel them locally.

So are those worries wrong? Does faith mean I shouldn't feel uneasy?

No. Feeling uneasy does not make someone un-Christian. Moral life is often lived in the space between competing

responsibilities. What the Bishops want to warn against is the way fears can harden into blame. After all, many of the difficulties we face “existed before immigration became a prominent issue.”

But migrants do seem to get blamed for everything.

They often do. That is why the Bishops return us to a fundamental Christian truth. Regardless of legal category or background, “what matters most to Christians is this: regardless of where a person was born or what passport they carry, they are our neighbour”. The Gospel does not allow us to turn people into problems. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

“The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin” (CCC, paragraph 2241).

At the same time, the Catechism also recognises the responsibility of public authorities to regulate migration in view of the common good. Catholic moral teaching insists on holding dignity and responsibility together, not setting them against each other.

Ireland has always thought of itself as a welcoming country. Do the Bishops say anything about that?

They do. Irish people left because of famine, poverty, and lack of opportunity, and many experienced suspicion and exclusion abroad. They also point out that the Catholic faith itself is a migrant faith from the beginning. Remember it spread through Ireland by Saint Patrick, “an immigrant and former slave”, and carried across the world by Irish migrants and missionaries.

Hospitality sounds good, but it can feel vague. What does it actually mean in practice?

This is one of the strongest parts of the pastoral letter. The Bishops distinguish between polite tolerance and real Christian hospitality. They call for a

“culture of encounter.” Polite tolerance merely puts up with newcomers. They warn it “can leave migrants feeling isolated”, while genuine encounter allows for “mutual enrichment” and shared belonging. Belonging means participation, friendship, and being able to put down roots in a community.

Does that actually happen anywhere?

Yes. The Bishops point to parishes where migrants are involved in parish life, schools, and local communities. As the letter puts it, diversity can be “a gift and a source of renewal”. There are many other examples, like GAA clubs, soccer clubs and other sports where immigrants and their families integrate very well – look to the current Irish soccer teams of all ages. It also happens in the workplace and other voluntary organisations.

But surely hospitality has limits. It can't mean chaos.

The Bishops are very clear about that. Immigration must be approached in a way that serves the common good, including both migrants and host communities. They encourage serious political debate and responsible policy-making.

So the Church isn't offering simple answers.

No. It is offering a way of seeing. It asks us to resist slogans, whether harsh or sentimental, and to stay close to the human reality. Every migrant has a story. Every community has limits.

And that brings us back to Christmas.

It does. The Christ child entered the world without security or certainty. He depended on welcome. He was carried across borders by parents seeking safety.

So what is Christmas asking of us now?

That we allow the mystery of the Incarnation to shape how we speak, how we listen, and how we treat one another. Under pressure, we can choose fear or encounter. The crib quietly reminds us which choice God made.

Let us not be afraid or threatened by the emergence of green shoots. Let us celebrate where we see evidence of them...



Green Shoots

Kieran O'Shea

I sit down to write this reflection on the evening of 15th December 2025 just having returned from St Kieran's College where Ms Gemma Mulligan the Diocesan Pastoral Coordinator and Fr Albert McDonald from the Diocese of Killaloe reflected on how parishes and diocese are working together as a new reality emerges for the Irish Church and indeed

for us here in Ossory. A phrase that was used and remains with me from the evening is 'green shoots'. Ben Bernanke, chairman of the US Federal Reserve during the Obama presidency originally used that phrase to describe the fragile yet promising signs of recovery emerging in the American economy following the crash of 2007 which coincided with the

collapse of the Celtic Tiger here in Ireland. To hear Gemma and Fr Albert speak of 'green shoots' as the Church embraces new challenges and opportunities was certainly encouraging. As I was driving away from the College I asked myself if I had witnessed any of these green shoots in our own parish, in our diocese? To answer that question is definitely YES and below I give two simple examples.

Prior to the event in St Kieran's College this evening St Fiacre's Church was filled with parents and children who are preparing for First Holy Communion. Every month families are invited to a meeting in St Fiacre's Church and to join us for the celebration of the Eucharist as weekends. There are two aspects of these preparations for First Communion and Confirmation that merit observation. Primarily I notice the amount of families (parents and children) turning up for our monthly meeting has increased these past two years with a spike in the level of engagement that has not always been the case. The monthly meetings with parents and children consist of Catechesis, Scripture reflection which tries to connect the Word of God to the lived experience of young families, some simple activity or other, provision of resources and of course communication of information. It is a very simple format and yet children and parents seem to want to be there. There seems to be evidence of a newfound hunger which provides an ideal opportunity not just to engage the children but to evangelise and catechise, to nourish parents and families with the basic food of our faith.

Secondly pre Sacramental parents groups as many of you will attest have the potential to slowly transform a parish into a school of synodality a place of communion, participation and mission. Like many parishes, here in St Patrick's there is a committee of parents who exercise leadership in preparing for family Masses and the monthly meetings. My colleague Felix and I are hardly able to

keep pace with the constant level of traffic on WhatsApp as families and schools are kept in the mix and volunteers for every task are 'encouraged' to partake! As part of this group we all bring something to the table. All of us have our own set of skills and gifts. No one has everything but when we share our gifts and talents, when we simply work together we learn very quickly a lesson that needs to be learned often - there is no I in Team!. In an interview given during September 2025 Pope Leo was asked to define synodality. He began his response by saying that "synodality is an attitude, an openness, a willingness to understand". When we embrace an attitude that seeks to 'expand the tent' another phrase from Isaiah also used in St Kieran's College earlier, when we are open to welcoming others on board, when we understand the context from which each person comes and the experiences that shapes their outlook on life, faith, and values, then the scene is set for the creation of new missionary disciples who can greatly enhance the experience of sharing and celebrating our faith.

At Diocesan level another indication of green shoots emerging was the launch of the Ministry of Catechist at the end of October 2025. Well over forty people from all across the diocese responded to the invitation to discern if this ministry is for them. Earlier this month those who registered gathered for a an information meeting and will now begin the process of discerning their vocational call further. You may say that forty plus people is not an explosion of interest. Yet it exceeds the number of priests we have in active ministry and certainly the level of interest in vocations to priesthood and religious life, another area of ministry that needs renewed focus. This article doesn't set out to deal extensively with 'the nuts and bolts' of the ministry of Catechist, the requirements for formation, job description etc, suffice it to say that at the heart of this ministry is an openness to grow in relationship with Jesus Christ,

to become examples of the joy and hope that comes from faith, to bring others to Jesus like the Apostle Andrew did with his brother Simon Peter. As Pope Benedict XVI remarked we bring others to Jesus Christ not by proselytisation but by 'attraction'. Catechists are those who keep the memory of God alive by attracting others into relationship with Christ who is the ultimate Catechist and model of formation.

Going back to Pope Leo's definition of synodality they are also called to have the attitude of Christ, to be open to the needs of their sisters and brothers and to understand the vicissitudes of today's world, seeing our communities and our society as fertile ground to receive Joy of the Gospel.

Thus the ministry of Catechist also becomes a launchpad for responding to the pastoral needs of particular communities including pastoral leadership. Thinking of the Benedictine maxim 'ora et labora' (prayer and work) all should be aware that ministry always has prayer and faith for its foundation but the building is done by getting our hands dirty and by wearing the smell of the sheep as Pope Francis called us to do.

In conclusion the two examples outlined above of the Pre Sacramental Programme and the launch of the Ministry of Catechist provide, in my humble opinion, evidence of green shoots emerging. It might be a good exercise for all of us as we approach the end of 2025 to bring to mind the green shoots visible in your parish or pastoral area. Do they indicate that we are there yet? No! However they show that we are well on the way to renewed Hope. During this Jubilee of Hope there have been many events to celebrate it. Yet it is People, many of them who for the first time put their heads above the parapet and know they are welcome and appreciated that are the true green shoots of Hope today and tomorrow in the Church. When we invite people in, when we are willing to expand the tent of our own hearts and minds, letting go of our fears, apathy, our clinging to the dead wood of the past then a new vibrancy and enthusiasm manifests itself which might just attract more people to join in the pilgrimage of Hope that is the mission of the Church. Let us not be afraid or threatened by the emergence of green shoots. Let us celebrate where we see evidence of them and let us encourage further growth.

From the beginning, the Christian community was characterized by many different forms of ministry carried out by men and women who, obedient to the working of the Holy Spirit, devoted their lives to the building up of the Church. At times, the charisms that the Spirit constantly pours out on the baptized took on a visible and tangible form of immediate service to the Christian community, one recognized as an indispensable diakonia for the community. The Apostle Paul authoritatively attests to this when he states that "there are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the

manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit; to another mighty deeds; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another varieties of tongues; to another interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes" (1 Cor 12:4-11).

APOSTOLIC LETTER ISSUED "MOTU PROPRIO"
BY THE SUPREME PONTIFF FRANCIS
"ANTIQUUM MINISTERIUM" INSTITUTING THE
MINISTRY OF CATECHIST

Advent is a season of preparation, but it is also a season of waiting, holy waiting, sacred waiting

Advent 2025

Gemma Mulligan



"Everything is changed; now is the time for the colour purple." These words from a Godly Play Advent story remind us that this is not ordinary time. Advent is a season of preparation, but it is also a season of waiting, holy waiting, sacred waiting.

As part of the Diocese of Ossory 2025 Advent Programme, organised by Ossory Adult Faith Development, a number

of gatherings were held involving children from the city parishes who are preparing for the sacraments. For these children and their families, this is a time of waiting and preparation not only for the celebration of Christmas, but also for the sacraments they will soon receive, making it a particularly special and important season.

The first gathering, for children preparing for Confirmation, brought children and their parents to St Mary's Cathedral for a short retreat. The focus of the retreat was both their upcoming Confirmation and the coming of Christ at Christmas. During our time together, we lit the candles on the Advent wreath and reflected on the themes of Peace, Hope, Joy, and Love. At the baptismal font in the Cathedral, the children were reminded of their baptism and how it marked the beginning of their full initiation into the Church through water and the Holy Spirit.

The children wrote prayers reflecting the themes of the evening, placed them in baskets, and lit tea-light candles, which they brought home afterwards. They were prayerful and reflective, and their enthusiasm and openness were deeply impressive. This gathering, for children in their final year of primary school, was an opportunity for reflection and prayer both for the children themselves and for their parents as they continue their journey toward the sacrament of Confirmation.

As the third Sunday of Advent approached, children preparing for First Holy Communion gathered in St Patrick's Parish Centre, Loughboy. Using Godly Play, an imaginative approach to nurturing the spiritual lives of children, we began the journey to Bethlehem. With the help of the Prophets, Mary and Joseph, the Shepherds, and the Magi, we prepared together for the birth of Jesus at Christmas.

The Godly Play Advent story is a Liturgical Action lesson that helps children make meaning of the rituals and symbols of Advent, inviting them to come close to the mystery of Christmas. As none of the children or adults had previously encountered Godly Play, it was a new experience for everyone. As with the Confirmation retreat, this coming together during Advent during a time of preparation for the sacraments, marked a special and important moment in the children's and families' spiritual journeys.

During these weeks of Advent The Ministry of Catechist information evening was





held. Almost fifty interested candidates came to St Patrick's Parish Centre to join with Bishop Coll and members of the working group.

In reflecting on the question, *"How do I know if I am being called to the Ministry of Catechist?"* those in attendance had been invited to consider the following:

- Do you have a strong living faith?
- Do you have a love for People and a heart for Service?
- Do you believe that Your Baptism calls you to share in Jesus' ministry?
- Do you feel that you might be called to share the Good news with children, teens, and adults in today's world?
- Are you a person who is already familiar with the life of the Church and can work collaboratively with others?
- Are you energised by the possibility of playing your part in the mission of evangelisation today?
- Are you a person of Hope?
- Are you a person who can exercise your vocational calling in a synodal way, i.e. listening to others and walking with them on their journey through life?
- Would you be willing to commit a sizeable amount of time to formation for ministry?

The group were invited to begin a time of prayerful reflection and preparation.

The time of discernment will continue into the summer months with a two-year academic formation programme beginning in September 2026. In his Pastoral Letter and invitation to the people of God in Ossory, Bishop Coll wrote "In the years ahead, trained catechists will play a vital part in building up the Church in Ossory. Some may go on to serve as pastoral workers, chaplains, liturgy leaders, administrators or in new ministries we have yet to imagine – all helping to shape a Church that is alive and active in the world. Let us take seriously the words we often hear at the end of every Mass: "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord." With the help of these new catechists – and the support of all God's people – may we continue to do just that in our homes, schools, workplaces and communities."

The Church in Ireland is in a time of transition from an institutional model to a Synodal one with greater involvement of laity in parishes, pastoral areas and dioceses. The training of lay ministers for pastoral work or as catechists is a meaningful way to respond to the baptismal call afforded to all the baptised. In this time of waiting and preparation during Advent, we remember those discerning this important ministry over the coming months.

Many of the elements required for a diocese are no longer present in large parts of Ireland. These include adequate numbers of clergy, religious, committed lay people and Catholic teachers.

Restructuring our dioceses and parishes

Albert McDonnell

Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council is the prism through which the contemporary Church understands the message of Christ. Our Church is a complex, supernatural/human reality whose human structure evolves over time.

Any discussion regarding the restructuring of dioceses departs from the reality of what a diocese is. Vatican II provides the following description.

A diocese is a portion of the people of God which is entrusted to a bishop to be shepherded by him with the cooperation of the presbyterate. Thus, by adhering to its pastor and gathered together by him through the Gospel and the Eucharist in the Holy Spirit, it constitutes a particular church in which the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative. (CD # 11)

During the preparatory phase of Vatican II, the issue of the size of dioceses was raised. The preparatory commission reached the non-controversial conclusion that 'Dioceses should not be too large or too small'. They went on to suggest that if a diocese is too big it should be subdivided and if too small amalgamated. They added that a committee should be set up

in each country to implement this process. The issue of diocesan boundaries was discussed by the Council fathers on 14 November 1963 and briefly during 1964. Nineteen council fathers contributed. There was an effort to identify the ideal population for a diocese and suggested figures ranged from 100,000 to 500,000 Catholics. Soon the discussion moved on from quantitative to qualitative considerations.

The issues identified included the financial support of the diocese, pastoral considerations such as a bishop knowing his priests and parishes and having adequate resources (not only financial) to administer a diocese. One contributor felt that a bishop should be able to visit all his diocese in the course of five years. Other issues included the desirability of preserving ancient sees which was countered by the argument that the Church is not a museum. Civil boundaries were viewed as relevant but not absolute. The territory of each diocese should be continuous.

The Council fathers saw dioceses as pastoral strategies. If they are not meeting that end, then they should be altered.

For a diocese to fulfil its purpose it is necessary that the nature of the Church

be clearly manifested in the People of God belonging to the diocese..... the spiritual welfare of the People of God must be catered for as perfectly as possible.' (CD#22)

The discussion was distilled into three paragraphs of the Vatican II document *Christus Dominus* (#22-#24). The review of diocesan boundaries is not optional if 'the good of souls requires it'. Discernment is needed and the final decision rests with the Holy See. However, Vatican II envisaged local episcopal conferences establishing a group to study the issue and make recommendations to Rome.

Vatican II gives little detail on the minimum size of existing dioceses. It states that a diocese must reflect the catholicity of the Church and possess the various charisms and diversity in cultural and socio-economic terms. However, *Ad Gentes* (Vatican II's Decree on Missionary Activity) provides criteria for the erection of new dioceses. We can reasonably deduce that if the elements needed to justify the erection of a new diocese are no longer present in an existing diocese, the future of that diocese is open to discussion.

Ad gentes # 19 lists a series of factors necessary for a diocese. It needs to be a community of faithful, a portion of the people of God, which has its own identity and stability. The faith should be rooted in the social and cultural life of the people. A diocese needs clergy, religious and committed lay people and a structure which promotes the Christian way of life. It requires adequate economic resources to permit a dignified and effective life. It needs a bishop. What is presented in *Ad Gentes* # 19 as the minimum requirement for a diocese is not mere survival but a reality that is rich in ministry, charism and witnesses to the Gospel both within and beyond the Church community. The question that dioceses in countries such as Ireland need to ask is can we meet this requirement for all our dioceses or are amalgamations necessary.

The example of Italy

Spain, Canada, Italy, Ireland and Wales are all undergoing a process leading to the reduction in the number of dioceses. Italy is the country with the largest Catholic population in Europe. Every pope since Vatican II has sought to reduce the number of dioceses in Italy. The most successful in this regard has been John Paul II. In 1986 over a hundred dioceses were suppressed. This was in the context of the revision of the concordat between Italy and the Holy See.

Pope Benedict felt that further progress was needed. He established a commission of bishops to study the issue. The question they were presented with was 'Are small dioceses capable of fulfilling their pastoral mission?' The commission set 90,000 as the minimum population required for a diocese. They also saw an adequate number of clergy and the vitality of lay ministry as central.

Pope Francis at his first meeting with the Italian Episcopal Conference on 23 May 2013 identified a further reduction in the number of dioceses as a priority. He introduced the current gradual approach that is now being applied in Ireland. First two dioceses are united by sharing a single bishop. Gradually through shared activities and resources, collaboration progresses until a full amalgamation became feasible. Over forty Italian dioceses were united using this gradual approach and some have progressed to full union. Pope Leo in his first meeting with the Italian bishops reiterated the necessity to reflect on the number of dioceses.

Reflections

The reception of Vatican II and its emphasis on the people of God and on pastoral priorities is at the centre of the process leading to the restructuring of dioceses. Issues around economic resources are rarely decisive while issues around people usually are. In the case

of Ireland, it is noteworthy that while the total population is increasing, the number of people who regard themselves as Catholic is declining. Many of the elements required for a diocese are no longer present in large parts of Ireland. These include adequate numbers of clergy, religious, committed lay people and Catholic teachers. It is increasingly difficult to populate pastoral councils and other consultative bodies. It lacks credibility to argue that the structures that were suitable for post famine Ireland are still appropriate today.

The amalgamation of two or more diocese is the creation of a new diocese. This presents the opportunity to embed the vision of Vatican II in the new structure. The creation of a new diocese comprising two or more previous dioceses will bring numerous challenges. Each diocese has its own traditions and ways of doing things. Each Irish diocese is a separate charity which will have to be subsumed into the new, single diocesan charity. The system of payment of clergy varies from diocese to diocese. Nevertheless, the creation of a reduced number of larger dioceses allows us to reform where needed, to foster synodal structures and to pool resources especially the charisms of all the baptised.

The restructuring of parishes

Two realities underpin the future of the Irish Church:

1. The way in which people engage with faith and Church has undergone radical change.
2. An accumulation of unplanned changes results in a collapse.

Ossory diocese is engaging in planned structural change. This process is both essential and difficult. It is essential because we can no longer sustain the structure of pastoral care that we all grew up with. When needs changes, structures must change.

All popes from Paul VI onwards have encouraged bishops and dioceses to make full use of the various options contained in church law regarding pastoral structures. The people best placed to make the determination are the bishop, clergy and people of each diocese. They understand the needs, opportunities and available resources. Pastoral structures are one area of Church life that is within the control of each diocese. Diocese and parish in a synodal Church are inclusive terms – bishop, clergy, religious, people of faith, people of good will. Discernment is essential. But discernment can't go on forever There must come a moment when reflection morphs into decision and action.

The code of canon law contains various options regarding parish structures, including:

- Each parish has its own parish priest;
- One priest is given responsibility for multiple parishes;
- A deacon, religious or lay person assumes responsibility for a parish in collaboration with a priest;
- Amalgamate parishes;
- The creation of pastoral areas where priests in collaboration with religious and committed lay people minister as part of a team.

A key principle underpinning the direction of travel in pastoral development in Irish dioceses is the expansion of ministry and enhanced co-operation between faith communities. This is the direction of travel being explored in Ossory. Pastoral areas are the basis for the new structures currently being explored in most Irish dioceses. A pastoral area is a grouping of three or more parishes that collaborate in deeper and more intentional ways than before. Each parish retains its own unique identity, similar to how siblings have their own unique personality in a human family. Clarity is important. If people, be they clergy or laity, are to work effectively together each person needs to understand their role and that

of the other members of the group. One of the key tasks that for the group of priests is to divide responsibilities between them. Written guidelines for each pastoral area can prove helpful. This should be a living document that will evolve as circumstances change. Collaboration is a skill that is learnt by doing. It also an area of ministry where training is beneficial.

The process of pastoral renewal that Irish dioceses have entered is characterised by building bridges within and between faith communities. There are numerous possible areas of pastoral collaboration. They include the following:

- The rotation of Sunday celebrants allows people to hear new voices and insights. The code of canon law permits priests to celebrate no more than three Sunday Masses. There needs to be a reasonable interval between Masses so that the priest may be available to the members of the congregation;
- Pastoral areas come together for special liturgies such as Lenten and advent reconciliation liturgies or special events such as retreats, missions, holy year liturgies. Preparation for the sacraments of initiation is often best done at pastoral area level. Many pastoral areas have created pastoral area choirs;
- Centralising administration through a central pastoral office is another benefit of pastoral areas. The advantages are especially significant in the case of compliance with the Charity Act, GDPR and safeguarding policies. A trained administrator in a central pastoral area office is in a good position to deal with financial records, tax refund applications, sacramental records, pastoral area newsletter and social media;
- Pooling resources at pastoral area level allows people to specialise in areas of ministry where they have special training or aptitude. These include school chaplaincy, ministry to the sick, liturgical formation and collaboration with volunteer pastoral ministers. Shared ministry also helps priests overcome issues such as isolation through regular

weekly meetings featuring shared prayer, discussion and planning;

- Volunteer Pastoral Ministers are increasing becoming part of Irish Church life. A key part of the new pastoral reality in Ireland is the expansion of ministry. Typically, volunteer pastoral ministers engage in a certified programme of preparation. They are commissioned by the bishop and minister in catechetics, funeral ministry, ministry to the sick, sacramental preparation, liturgy etc.;
- The key canonical bodies in our parishes that serve as instruments of synodality are the finance and pastoral councils. Finance councils are obligatory in Church law. A single finance council may serve an entire pastoral area. The members need to be competent and well regarded. In one of our pastoral areas a single finance council serves all the parishes in that area. Pope Francis referred to parish pastoral councils as essential. Where parishes are grouped together, you may have a single pastoral council for the entire pastoral area. Alternatively, each parish may retain its individual pastoral council and the family of parishes may establish a co-ordinating group composed of representatives from each parish pastoral council. This pastoral area group co-ordinates issues of relevance to the entire pastoral such as the schedule for Christmas and Easter, celebration of sacrament of initiation, administration, social media etc.

Faith in Christ does not depend on structure. When Ireland moved from a monastic centred church to a diocesan structure the faith wasn't extinguished. Somebody blew out the altar candles for the final time in Aghaboe and similar places. But the light re-emerged elsewhere on altars and in hearts. We once again find ourselves at a moment of transition as we place our trust in the ever-faithful Lord.

"Enlarge the space of your tent, spread out your tent cloths unsparingly, lengthen your ropes and make firm your pegs" (Is 54:2).

Dominicans celebrate 800 years



15th June Solemnity of Holy Trinity Mass and Ordination



15th June Solemnity of Holy Trinity Mass and Ordination



Opening Mass 19th January



15th June Solemnity of Holy Trinity Mass and Ordination



Feast of St Catherine of Siena 29th April



Feast of St Catherine of Siena 29th April

The Man Born To Be King Play 9th - 11th September



The Man Born To Be King Play 9th - 11th September



Black Abbey History Talk 14th May 2025



Jubilee of Choirs Nov 22nd 2025



Cashel Pilgrimage 19th July



Opening Mass 19th January



Vocations in Ossory

How do I take a first step on
the road of discovery?

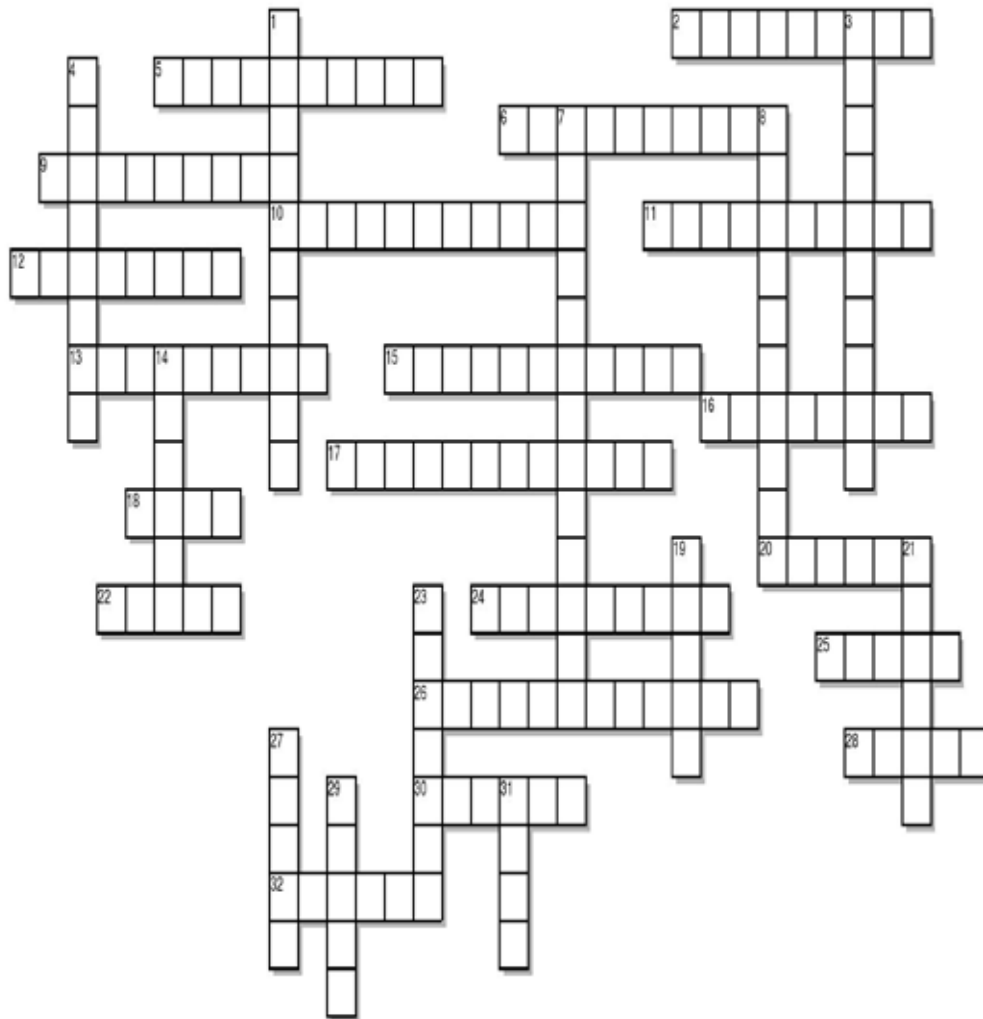
How do I know what life path
I should take?

take a first step
on the journey of
discovery...



Contact
FR MARK CONDON
VOCATIONS DIRECTOR
vocations@ossory.ie

CHRISTMAS CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 2 Book of Church teachings
- 5 Gathering of Irish Bishop - the episcopal
- 6 Sermon on the Mount
- 9 A holy respect
- 10 Teaching office of the Church
- 11 Letter from the Pope
- 12 The first sin
- 13 Linked to the Apostles
- 15 We are all one
- 16 Title given to one retired
- 17 On entering a Church
- 18 This is of confession
- 20 Angel of the highest order
- 22 This Church law
- 24 This font is the beginning
- 25 Make up for sin

- 26 Gifts of the Spirit
- 28 God's offer of help to us
- 30 He will find for us a new Bishop
- 32 To where Bishop Niall returns

DOWN

- 1 Deliverance from sin
- 3 The conception of Our Lady
- 4 Pertaining to those who have received orders
- 7 He will lead our Diocese for now
- 8 Of these we have seven
- 14 Type of vow
- 19 Catholic actress Katie
- 21 Mother of the prophet Samuel
- 23 The sede in Ossory now
- 27 "We ___ Thee"
- 29 ___ infallibility
- 31 Brother of Abel

Send your entries, with your name, address, email and mobile number, to:

"Ossory Times Competition",
Ossory Adult Faith
Development,
St Kieran's College,
College Road,
Kilkenny,

by 10th March 2026 first
correct entry from the hat wins!

Prize for age 5-8

**Colouring
Competition**

€20 Voucher
Gift Voucher
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Prize for age 8-13

**Wordsearch
Competition**

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Gift Voucher
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**Prize for Adult
Crossword
Competition**

€50 Voucher
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*Congrats to the winners
from the Ossory Times
Issue 38 competitions:*

Adult Crossword:
Maire Grennan

**Children's Wordsearch,
age 8-13:**
Aoife Fitzgerald

**Children's Colouring,
age 5-8:**
Dan Hickey

Colouring Competition



For ages 5-8



Wordsearch Competition



For ages 8-13

- WORDSEARCH -

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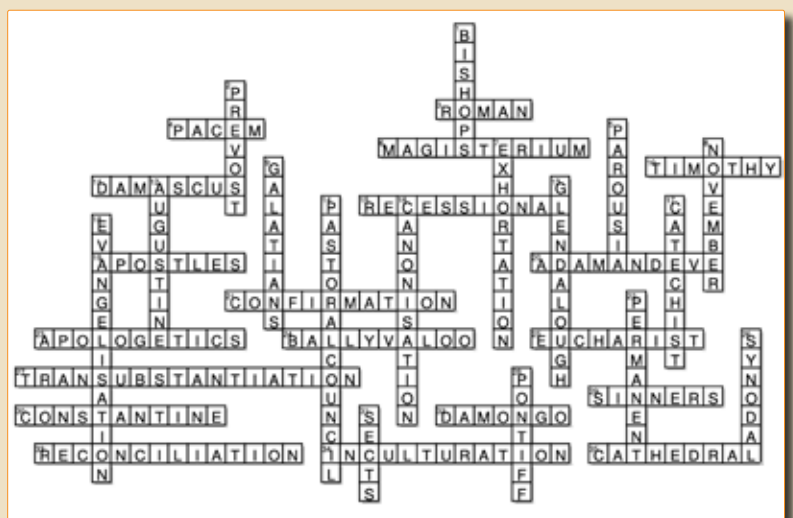
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Answers to Ossory Times Issue 39



Answers to Ossory Times Issue 39





ONLINE PARISH PROGRAMME OF PREPARATION

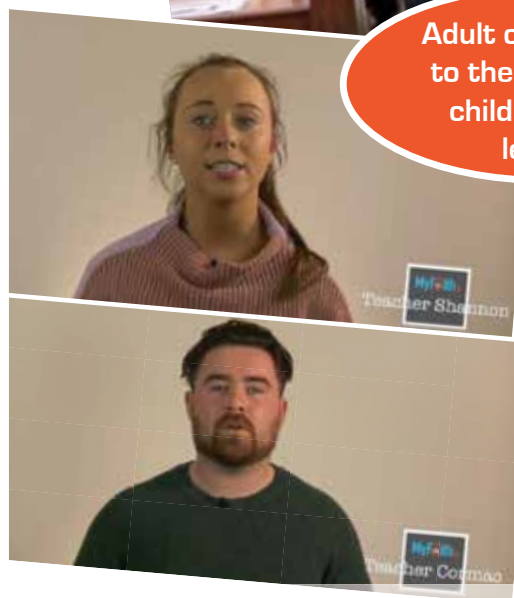
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- Sunday by Sunday Workbook to encourage active participation
- Lent and Easter Workbooks
- Resources for monthly parish meetings to support the children
- Prepare for the Sacraments in a fun and interactive way

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children with games and
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to support the
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