

# ‘GO MAKE DISCIPLES’

Extracts from Waterford & Lismore Diocesan Pastoral Plan  
2019-2024 - Published 9 June 2019

**The Vision:** Faced with a changed world and a changed Church, we ask ... What is the Holy Spirit saying to us at this critical point in our history? I put before you a vision for the future of the Church in this Diocese which has arisen from the Listening Process which took place ... last year. The core of this vision is summed up in the title of our new Diocesan Plan: ‘**Go Make Disciples**’. Jesus says in the Gospel of John: *‘By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples’* (15:8). What does the Lord mean by the phrase ‘bear fruit’? In his last recorded words on earth before the Ascension, Jesus says: *‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.’* (Mt 28:19-20) Bearing fruit is essentially this: making disciples. You and I are called to reach out to everyone without exception ... In his marvellous document on evangelisation today, *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG), Pope Francis urges us to be **missionary disciples**.

**Divine Renovation - a Key Inspiration:** This new Diocesan Pastoral Plan requires **a change of mentality, moving ‘from maintenance to mission’** (see Fr James Mallon in his book, **Divine Renovation**). Father Mallon and his parish renewal programme, called ‘**Divine Renovation**’, **has been a key inspiration for our new plan**. We cannot do the same things we have always done and expect a different result. The culture around us is not neutral. It is now largely anti-Christian (see EG, 2)

**Continuing as before is not an option:** Going out to make disciples cannot happen unless there is a renewal within. Pope Francis invites **‘all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ’** (EG, 3). We always begin with Christ and we note the urgency in the Pope’s plea. No one will want to be part of a community that is spiritually dead. In order to better manage this evangelical approach we will need a greater emphasis on team ministry in new Pastoral units across the Diocese, where small groups of parishes, their clergy and

trained laity will work in teams to go out and ‘bear fruit’ along with the faithful.

**The Alpha Programme** is being rolled out across the diocese **to rekindle faith in Jesus as our Lord and Saviour** who forms us into his missionary disciples. Further Adult Faith Formation programmes will build on this ... God wants us to be missionary disciples, to work through us, to love him above all things and then to bring others closer to Christ through his Church.



**Evangelisation and Formation in Faith – a Pastoral Priority:** ... Mindful of Pope Francis’ vision for the Church, the people’s views and hopes, the vision of Bishop Philip Egan (shared at a conference in Clonmel) and Fr James Mallon of the Divine Renovation Network, the way forward was clarified for us. With the rapid secularisation of society and the decline in the practice of the faith, **people recognised that evangelisation and formation in faith was a pastoral priority...** We believe that the thrust of the Plan is faithful to Pope Francis’ dream for the Church today: “I dream of ... a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, schedules and structures can be channeled for the evangelisation of today’s world **rather than for her self-preservation.**”

**Structures to Focus on Mission:** The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open. (EG, 27) Such a missionary option calls for a radical change of culture in our local Church. The culture must be **transformed from one of maintenance to a culture that gives priority to mission**. The focus of the Pastoral Plan is to affect this cultural transformation.

**Go Make Disciples:** The title of the Plan arises from the Great Commission of the risen Jesus to the disciples before the Ascension. He said: *‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...’* (Mt 28:19-20). To be a disciple is to be engaged in a lifelong process of learning from and about

Jesus... Other elements of the process of discipleship are spelled out in the book of Acts. The *'disciples devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching* and were committed to *'fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayer and the service'*; *'there was not a needy person among them'* (Acts 2:42, 4:34). So a disciple is one who responds to the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ and is committed to formation in the faith. He/she is also called to belong in the faith community and to participate in the life of the community, to grow in holiness and to reach out in service to others.

**The four marks of Discipleship:** Evangelisation, Community, Liturgy and Prayer and Service. 4 themes emerge from these priority areas:

**Theme 1: Evangelisation: Alpha to be offered in all parishes:**

For Pope Francis, evangelisation is first and foremost a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. 'I invite all Christians everywhere at this moment to a renewed encounter with Jesus Christ or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day' (EG, 3). Our first core strategic objective is to provide opportunities for new evangelisation. By 'new evangelisation' we mean the action of reaching out to Catholics who have discontinued the practice of the faith and are alienated from Church.

The Alpha Programme is to be offered in all parishes or groups of parishes to begin this process of evangelisation. Parishioners are urged to reach out and to invite friends and neighbours who have given up on Church to attend the Alpha series of talks. The aim is that once people are awakened to this personal relationship with Jesus, it will lead them to a process of conversion and to the transformation of life.

The Alpha Programme has been presented in a number of parishes in the Diocese already and has proven to be a very effective evangelising tool. However, it is important that people, who have been awakened by the Alpha experience, do not feel abandoned when it is completed.

Where Alpha is already established in a parish, an Alpha Programme will begin in September 2019. Elsewhere, parish teams are to be trained in September 2019 and the Alpha Programme is to be launched in parishes in January 2020. Beginning Easter 2020, groups to be established after the completion of two Alpha programmes.

The Plan envisages that Alpha 'graduates' could be invited to join **'Connect' groups** which are specifically designed to offer ongoing and continuing support in the form of a caring community. These groups could meet once or twice a month in the homes of parishioners. The meeting would consist of a shared meal, a talk by a member and a time of praying for and with one another. Training will be provided for leaders of these groups.

**Theme 2: Community** Creating communities of faith characterised by hospitality, belonging and acceptance; service to families, young people, the sick and marginalised

**Theme 3: Liturgy and Prayer:** Enhancing the quality of our liturgical celebrations and providing opportunities for spiritual growth in order to grow in the love of God and of one another

**Theme 4: Service:** remodelling leadership and governance structures to serve the mission of evangelising and transforming the world

**Timing**

- Phase One will cover the first two years of the plan from September 2019 to September 2021.
- Phase Two will run from Sept 2021 to Sept 2024. The actions associated with each phase are clearly indicated in the Plan. It is envisaged that the Plan will be completed by the end of Phase Two,

**Director of Youth Ministry** is to be appointed - The Diocese is committed to the evangelising of youth

**A new Director of Pastoral Development** at Diocesan level will be appointed to direct the implementation and ongoing review of this Plan.

**Practical ways of promoting Ecumenism in the Diocese:** The Bishop is to formally approach local leaders in Church of Ireland and other Christian denominations. Also, local Alpha teams are to issue invitations to neighbouring Christian communities.

See the Full Pastoral Plan: <https://www.waterfordlismore.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Pastoral-Plan-2019-for-Website.pdf>