

*Church of Ireland
United Dioceses of Dublin & Glendalough*

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**PASTORAL LETTER TO BE READ IN ALL CHURCHES IN THE UNITED
DIOCESES OF DUBLIN AND GLENDALOUGH ON SUNDAY APRIL 3rd 2016**

INTRODUCTION

May grace, mercy and peace from God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you all in the Season of Easter. I write to you as a fellow disciple and as bishop of the United Dioceses of Dublin and Glendalough, wishing you joy and hope in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Together we witness, as members of the Church of Ireland, to the presence of God in the communities of which we are part in the counties of Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow and in the city of Dublin. Our two dioceses were confirmed as a united diocese in 1216. We have remained united to this day. This year, in 2016, we mark 800 years of united diocesan life. This unity has survived the Reformation and the ravages of Oliver Cromwell. Our shared faith and communal respect for one another across the united dioceses are the lifeblood of our witness to the Gospel.

CHRISTIAN WITNESS

The calling of the church is the sending of God's people to serve in the world in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The administrative structures of our dioceses and parishes help to shape the ways in which we express our faith in the Gospel for the wider community. We belong to diocese and parish at the same time. The parishes cluster together in Rural Deaneries of six parishes to each Deanery. Some parishes are combined in Deaneries across the boundaries between Dublin and Glendalough. The Rural Deanery structure works very effectively for example in the organization of Confirmations. It is a genuine pleasure for me personally to visit so many parishes on a regular basis to confirm candidates, to meet their families and friends and to work with local clergy and readers.

The Rural Deanery structure also works very effectively for local Christian witness. We are currently engaged in two shared activities which are feeding diocesan life and witness: Come&C and The Jerusalem Link. One is an expression of local discipleship and witness, and the other is an expression of witness abroad in partnership with the Holy Land. Both these projects were endorsed by Diocesan Synods, showing vision and foresight in this regard and a genuine commitment to a shared future expressed through Christian witness.

THE COMMISSION ON EPISCOPAL MINISTRY AND STRUCTURES

The Commission was established four years ago by the General Synod to reform the dioceses of the Church of Ireland and their composition. Its aim has been to make dioceses more fit for mission by attempting to even up the number of parishes across the church in each diocese under one bishop. The Bill to be brought before General Synod 2016 for enactment as legislation includes the removal of six parishes from the United Dioceses, specifically from Glendalough Diocese, and their annexation to the Dioceses of Meath and Kildare. It requires the removal from Dublin and Glendalough of six out of the fifteen existing parish groupings of Glendalough Diocese in perpetuity: Athy with Kilberry, Kilkea and Fontstown; Narraghmore, Timolin, Castledermot and Kinneagh; Blessington with Kilbride, Ballymore-Eustace and Hollywood; Celbridge with Straffan and Newcastle-Lyons; Donoughmore with Donard and Dunlavin; and Leixlip and Lucan. A total of twenty individual churches and parishes is affected by this decision.

When CEMS visited the Diocesan Councils in December 2015 to consult about the proposals to be brought before General Synod in 2016, this proposal was not mentioned. Neither was it mentioned when members of the Commission consulted members of Dublin and Glendalough Diocesan Synods in October 2014. Neither has it formed any part of the Commission's reports made to General Synod on an annual basis.

RESPONSE

I have called an extraordinary meeting of Diocesan Synods in Athy, by kind permission of the rector and Select Vestry, on Wednesday 20th April, beginning in St Michael's Church with a celebration of Holy Communion at 7pm to enable discussion of the content of this forthcoming Bill. The meeting may continue as long as is required on that evening to facilitate a full and open discussion and debate around an issue that touches the heart of each and every one of us. I urge everyone who has been elected to serve to attend. I also urge parishioners right across the United Dioceses to consult in any appropriate way and to consider the issues that affect all of us as members of our diocesan family with your rectors, Members of Diocesan and General Synods and Members of Diocesan Councils so that your voice may be represented and heard at this extraordinary Synod.

I feel duty bound to alert members of parishes to the inevitable financial consequences of the Bill if enacted for the whole of the United Dioceses. The financial arrangements internal to each of the twelve dioceses in the Church of Ireland are significantly different. The content of the Bill to come before General Synod 2016 (May 12-14) will increase the financial provision required from each constituent parish unit of the United Dioceses of Dublin and Glendalough.

As your archbishop and bishop, I am fully committed to the flourishing of each constituent parish of the existing United Dioceses of Dublin and Glendalough. As things stand, in our 800th year of united and shared witness, we have a wonderful combination of rural and urban life that we share with one another and with others within the love of God. As we move forward together in mission and service, all of you remain in my prayers as together we celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and seek to discern God's way.



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