

(Down 3) Downpatrick Family of Parishes – Downpatrick/Saul & Ballee/Bright
(Killough)/Strangford (Kilclief)/Dunsford & Ardglass.

Feedback from the second evening of conversations with clergy and parishioners.
Tuesday 12th November 2024

The event was facilitated by Canon John Murray and Aishling Steen (Mentor & Member of the Pathways to the Future Team.)

Attendance:

Clergy: Canon John Murray, Fr Peter O’Kane, Fr Gerry Mc Closkey, Fr Aidan Brankin

Apologies: Deacon Jackie Breen

Approximately 37 parishioners attended representing all the parishes in the Downpatrick Family of Parishes.

Parish	Attendance (Number of)
Downpatrick	18
Bright (Killough)	4
Dunsford & Ardglass	5
Saul & Ballee	7
Strangford (Kilclief)	3

Canon Murray opened the evening.

Aishling provided a recap and summary of the previous conversations which took place in May 2024 and began the evening with a prayer inviting those in attendance to reflect on the gospel of the day, (Luke 17:7-10) - Servitude & Faithfulness.

An update on the New Configuration of Parishes.

Canon John Murray invited parishioners to share their thoughts on how well parishioners are connecting to the new family of parishes structure and any challenges or issues that are emerging.

Responses include:

It has been very beneficial that the clergy and respective parishes are working closer together in relation to celebrating the sacraments for children.

There have been increased opportunities for the lay faithful to take the lead on lay led novenas and liturgies when the priest is not available.

The recent appointment of Fr Aidan Brankin to the parishes of Saul & Ballee & Kilclief & Strangford was welcomed by parishioners who felt isolated and disconnected in the absence of a parish priest.

A number of parishioners have now been trained by the Pathways to the Future Office as Lay Funeral Ministers. The role of the lay Ministers include leading prayer during the following Rites :

- Gathering in the presence of the Body.
- Transfer of the body to the Church.
- Reception of the body at the Church.
- The Rite of Committal at the Graveside or Crematorium.
- Assist with the preparation of the funeral liturgy.

Those commissioned in this ministry have been readily welcomed by both clergy and families who have experienced bereavement. They have been warmly embraced by the parishes. Clergy expressed their gratitude in relation to the support that they can provide to them in ministering to families grieving the loss of a loved one. One recently bereaved family felt 'acknowledged and embraced by the parish at this difficult time' due to the presence of the lay funeral minister leading prayer in their home.

Group discussion.

Parishioners were invited to gather within their parish groups to reflect on the following questions:

- *What do we need as a parish/parish family?*
- *How can we best achieve this?*
- *How can we best work as a Family of Parishes?*
- *How can Pathways support us to do this?*

Points expressed from parish group discussion are just below:

We would like to:

- *Connect better with young families.*
- *Create a culture of welcome and belonging especially reaching those who feel disconnected from parish life.*
- *Increase the number of Lay Funeral Ministers.*
- *Better explore how to work best as a parish family and to encourage further 'in house' conversations.*
- *Liaise better with homes and schools.*
- *Provide formation and training to parishioners who have the potential to lead parish groups.*
- *Have more engagement and better outreach with a heart for evangelisation.*
- *Increase engagement in liturgy and ministry.*
- *Better engage with Youth and Parents.*
- *Provide opportunities for hospitality.*
- *Have a regular family/children's mass.*
- *Encourage unity and cohesiveness within our parish family.*
- *See opportunities to work together on joined up projects with all the different parishes within our family.*

- *Think about designating a role for a co-ordinator to work with all the parishes and to regularly liaise with the clergy.*
- *Share Mass times of all the parishes in the one communication and to highlight upcoming events through a monthly newsletter perhaps.*
- *Ask the Diocese (Pathways) for further support and training on how to maximise skills around social media and promotion.*
- *Develop a better way of communicating to all the parishes at the same time.*
- *Have a social media page for each parish so that events, faith development courses, and up to date news can be shared between all the parish Facebook pages to maximise reach.*
- *Avail of guidance and ideas on how to set up a Youth Ministry group.*
- *Reform and refresh our Parish Pastoral Councils.*
- *Explore key parish events with a greater outreach to those who are not regular Mass goers or who are disconnected from Church.*
- *Develop a centralised information system for all 5 parishes within the family. For example: A bulletin.*
- *Have clarity over the different roles required in a parish.*
- *Outreach to the GAA.*

The work of the Pathways to the Future Office.

Aishling provided an update to clergy and parishioners on the work of the **Pathways to the Future** Office since the last meeting in May 2024. This update was welcomed by both clergy and parishioners who were keen to be updated on the work taking place across the Diocese of Down and Connor and to hear about new resources and training that will assist and support the themes and ideas that have been highlighted through parish conversations.

Some of these developments have included:

Facilitation training - The Pathways to the Future Office contacted all clergy to ask them to put forward people in their parish who could avail of facilitation training. This training would benefit those who would like to be involved in their Parish Pastoral Council, faith formation, and leading groups in various different capacities in their parish. Three parishioners from the Parish of Bright and one parishioner from the parish of Downpatrick availed of the training. There was some disappointment that only 4 people were put forward from the Downpatrick family which includes 5 parishes. It is hoped that more will avail of future training opportunities.

Lay Funeral Ministry Training.

So far 70 Lay Funeral Ministers have undergone training and been commissioned by the Diocese. Further training will be offered in 2025. Parishes are encouraged to continue to identify and recommend new people for this ministry.

A Family Guide to Planning and Celebrating a Funeral in the Catholic Church.

This resource has been designed to be available in each parish and can be given to families at the time of a loved one's death. The hope is that it will be a source of guidance and comfort as families make important decisions, honouring both the faith and the life of their loved one. Booklets are available through the parish office either as a hard copy or as a pdf booklet. You can also access this resource by visiting pathwaystothefuture.org and downandconnor.org

Faith Development Programmes.

The Pathways to the Future Office continues to develop training and resources to coincide with key liturgical times of the year. Further opportunities for facilitation training within the context of parish ministry will take place in January and February 2025. Clergy will be sent an email with further information in due course.

Parishes are encouraged to avail of the training and resources and to recommend potential facilitators to deliver a number of programmes in their parish. An Advent resource has been developed which parishes can avail of as we begin to prepare for Christmas and the Jubilee Year (2025).

Parish Baptism Teams.

The Pathways to the Future Office is currently developing a resource to encourage parishes to set up Parish Baptism Teams if they have not done so already. This resource will include training for leaders and a guide on introducing parents and sponsors to the sacrament of Baptism and the significance of their role in passing the faith on to their child. There will be suggestions on how to create a culture of faith in the home and parishes will reflect on how best to continue to engage with young families following their child's Baptism.

Parish Pastoral Council Training

The Pathways to the Future team is rolling out a programme of leadership training to all parishes in the Diocese to support the formation or reconstitution of Parish Pastoral Councils

The programme launches with an information meeting which is open to all interested parishioners. The meeting will provide an overview of the context, role, and responsibilities of a Parish Pastoral Council, and the gifts, skills, and qualities required to be a PPC member. It is designed to help those who may have an interest in this leadership role to understand what the role entails and discern if it is a role for them. At the conclusion of the meeting, anyone who has an interest in serving on the PPC will be invited to register their name before leaving the meeting or to submit it subsequently to their Parish Office.

Dates for the new year will be shortly confirmed for the Downpatrick Family of Parishes.

Any other business

Canon John Murray thanked Aishling and everyone who attended the evening and recommended that parish conversations continue so that forward thinking and planning can become more strategic while continuing to build connections within the parish family.