



Process for the Modification of Parishes for Mission

May 2026

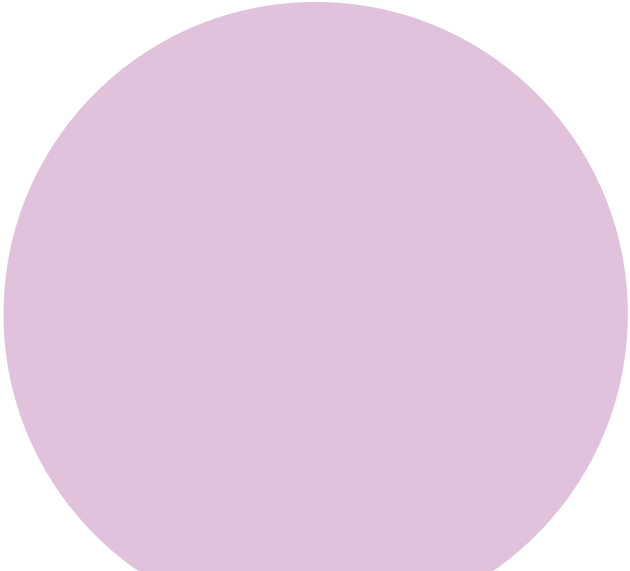
Archdiocese of Dublin





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COME, HOLY SPIRIT, FILL OUR HEARTS WITH THE FIRE OF YOUR LOVE

Pastoral Letter – Archbishop Dermot Farrell

AT PENTECOST, RECOGNISING THE HOLY SPIRIT at work within and among them, Mary and the Apostles took courage in their hands and opened the doors behind which they had locked themselves. They were no longer afraid of the future that was unfolding for them, no longer constrained by what might go wrong. They were ready to proclaim, to whoever might listen, their experience of what had happened to them with Jesus, their discovery of his good news, of what God had done, and was still doing, in him:

‘They were all filled with the Holy Spirit’... and all who assembled were ‘each one, bewildered to hear them speaking in their own language. They were amazed and astonished’... saying ‘we hear them preaching in our own language about the marvels of God.’ (Acts 2:1-11)

As people of faith, ‘baptised and sent’, we too are encouraged, by the very same Spirit, to recognise afresh the newness and hope Christ brings into our own lives. We are called to listen to each other’s experience of the life he brings us, to live and celebrate in new ways what it means to be followers of Christ, to share his good news and consolation, to witness to ‘the marvels of God’ (Acts 2:11) today.

Our world has changed and is continuing to change. Parishes are changing too and need to find new expression, allowing new forms of pastoral care to emerge, ‘from which Christian witness can shine for the world’. (Dicastery for the Clergy, *The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the Service of the Evangelising Mission of the Church*, 2020, 123).

It is in this spirit and in this hope that this Pentecost Letter puts before the Diocese a process which provides for initial reflection in parishes on their future. This process also sets out the formal steps to be taken, together with the Archbishop, when new parish structures and relationships are being considered: a *Process for the Modification of Parishes for Mission* (May 2026).

This initiative is born out of a concern for the pastoral care and good of all Christ’s people. It is the fruit of careful consideration by the Council of Priests, as well as conversation at the

Diocesan Pastoral Council and in Deaneries. Where there is a need, and following an appropriate process, the modification of parishes as envisaged here can strengthen the faith and life of our parish communities, 'opening up new ways to accompany the people of our time and creating new possibilities for mission' (*Process for the Modification of Parishes for Mission*, p. 7).

I ask Parish Pastoral Councils and Partnership Pastoral Councils, through prayer, listening, discernment and decision-making, to find together a way into the future for their parishes locally. We are all called to work co-responsibly in the forming of vibrant and faith-filled communities, together with the families, people and clergy that serve and support these communities in their mission.

When the Church is most truly itself, when we are most truly who God calls us to be, we journey together into our common future. As I said in my homily during our Diocesan Pilgrimage to Knock this year:

'This is the meaning of synodality: it means making decisions together and not doing things or making decisions in isolation.' (25th April 2026).

In our time, just as in the days of the Apostles, we need to accompany each other on our journey in faith, *Building Hope*. Without doubt, we must find new ways of binding ourselves together as disciples of Christ, sharing our efforts, establishing flexibility, renewing our energy. This is the challenge for the Church across the world. In the words of Pope Leo:

'Today we need to look to the future with hope and build the hope of the future. Do not be afraid to do so!' (Homily, Kilamba, Angola, 19th April 2026).

If we have the courage to face up to the reality of our local Church today, we will clearly see that we need to travel lighter, and that already we need to let go of many things which we considered essential, but, which now – truth be told – overburden us. The first words of Christ after his resurrection are, 'Peace be with you.' (John 20:19). These are always Christ's first words to the living Church. Do not be afraid (see John 14:27). The living Church will always need the Lord's courage and comfort, because the living Church is always going into new places, proclaiming good news to the poor, meeting people where they are, and this is – more often than not – challenging.

In the Holy Spirit, we are called to let go of what was, and open ourselves to where Christ is leading us, to embrace the hope God has for us and for all creation. Just as for the first

disciples, this will mean a letting-go. There will be a sense of grief and loss, but there can also be liberation in letting go and starting anew. Is not this the sense of freedom, the renewed strength that we read about in the account of Pentecost in the Acts of the Apostles, the renewed life the Apostles received, their new hope and confidence in God?

Let us show ourselves faithful and creative, hope-filled and resilient, synodal and pro-active. Using all our charisms, gifts and ministries, the Spirit of Truth and Love will help us find new ways to express, generously, what the Church can be for all the world to see and hear:

‘There are a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done, but always to the same Lord... Just as a human body, though it is made up of many parts, is a single unit because all these parts, though many, make one body, so it is with Christ.’ (1 Corinthians 12:4-6,12)

The Spirit is already working abundantly in our midst: ‘The Holy Spirit illumines all believers with the light of hope.’ (Pope Francis, *Hope Does Not Disappoint*, May 2024, 3). Now is the time, in prayer and reflection, to deepen the renewal which has been long under way among us. We do not know what new things may be revealed when we allow Jesus to be our inspiration, and his Spirit, our guide, to fill our hearts with the fire of God’s faithfulness to us and his providence. Like Mary and the Apostles, we too may be ‘amazed and astonished’!

With hope and humility, we look to the future. May the peace of Christ, and the fullness of life he brings, be with you.

Mary, Mother of the Church, our Mother, pray for us.

Pope St John XXIII, pray for us.

Pope St Paul VI, pray for us.

Pope St John Paul II, pray for us.



+Dermot Farrell

Archbishop of Dublin

Pentecost, 24th May 2026

INTRODUCTION

The primary motivation in considering modification of a parish is to provide for the pastoral care and good of the faithful people of God. A parish, being a community of Christ's faithful, is perpetual by nature. A parish can only be notably altered with 'just cause'.

The process is to be underpinned by the principles of synodality: prayer, listening, discernment and decision-making. Particular attention should be given to the individuals and groups concerned. The synodal method enables respectful conversations. It enhances good communications between Parish Pastoral Councils (PPCs), parishes within the partnership, parishioners and school communities locally. Following this process will help those who participate to be fully informed, understand the issues raised, discern together ways forward and appreciate new pastoral possibilities.

The conditions of the parishes in all their aspects are to be considered. The modification of parishes can strengthen the faith and the life of the respective parishes, opening up new ways to accompany the people of our time and creating new possibilities for mission [see [Archdiocese of Dublin Statement of Mission](#)].

The process for the Modification of Parishes, when the need arises, is set out below. It is guided by the Instructions of the Dicastery for the Clergy. The process takes place within the context of the partnership of parishes established by Archbishop Farrell (December 2022) across the Archdiocese through the *Building Hope* pastoral renewal initiative.

OVERVIEW

- Following local conversations, a desire may be expressed to the Archbishop, or he may request, that the possibility of parish modification be explored.
- The Archbishop will write to initiate formally the Process of Modification appointing two or three people to oversee and guide the process.
- They will ensure an accurate written record accompanying each stage in the process is maintained.
- They will undertake a scoping exercise or initial assessment leading to a **Factual Statement** and an **Initial Timeline**.
- The Factual Statement and Initial Timeline should be discussed with the Archbishop before formal local conversations begin and the Council of Priests is informed (see **Steps to be taken in Formal Process of Modification** below).
- A period of up to a year may be required for the whole process – but this will depend on local needs and specific circumstances.

FACTUAL STATEMENT

A Factual Statement is drafted with the assistance of the Diocesan Communications Office, highlighting the pastoral realities and drawing on liturgical, statistical and financial information. Other diocesan offices and commissions, for example the Office of the Moderator, the Chancellery, the Office of Mission & Ministry, the Finance Secretariat, the Analysis & Forecasting Commission etc., may support the conversations. The following or similar points and/or issues that pertain locally should be addressed in discerning the appropriate provision for the pastoral care and mission of the parish community into the future:

- the changing demographics in the area;
- the trends in the Catholic population of the parish;

- the history and context of the parish within the wider deanery;
- the individual parish pastoral vitality;
- the capacity to celebrate the liturgy;
- the parish in partnership and the geographical proximity of buildings;
- the financial situation (including recent fundraising) and resources (including buildings and grounds);
- the parish schools (primary and post-primary);
- the presence of religious congregations ministering locally;
- the type of parish modification which may be suitable (usually 1 or 2 below):
 1. Merger: where two or more former parishes unite to become a single new parish; all previous parishes become extinct – A and B unite to form C, only C remains (Canon 121)
 2. Amalgamation: A is subsumed into B, only B remains (by analogy to Canon 121)

EARLY COMMUNICATIONS

The importance of early, clear and respectful communications (conversations) is a key element in the process. Individuals are to be brought into the process as appropriate, consistent insofar as possible with the **Initial Timeline**, and are asked to maintain confidentiality until others are approached by those leading the process. All are encouraged to be respectful of the process and people in the process:

- Pastoral Team and Staff (employees)
- Pastoral Council and Finance Committee Chairpersons and Members
- School leadership teams i.e., Principal and Deputy Principal, Chair of the Board of Management

STEPS TO BE TAKEN IN THE FORMAL PROCESS OF MODIFICATION

[Training / support will be made available as necessary]

- 1. The Parish Pastoral Council of each parish meets to pray and reflect on the matter.**
 - The agenda item focuses on the contents of the Factual Statement.
- 2. The PPCs of the parishes that are considering modification come together.**
 - They pray and reflect together on the matter as outlined in the Factual Statement.
 - What has arisen for them in their initial PPC conversations?
- 3. Open Parish Conversations held in the individual parishes.**
 - These gatherings require pre-planning and should be assisted by a Facilitator (arranged through the Diocesan Office of the Moderator) familiar with the pastoral situation in the Archdiocese.
- 4. Open gathering of all of the joint parishes concerned (A second gathering might be required, depending on issues raised etc.)**
 - These meetings require pre-planning and should be led by the Facilitator.
- 5. Meeting with the Archbishop to inform him of the outcome of the process.**
 - Following these steps, when the process had been completed, those who have overseen the process, the Parish Priests and Chairs of PPCs of the parishes concerned will meet with the Archbishop (along with the Moderator of the Diocesan Curia and the Chancellor) to inform him of the outcome of the process and to present a written Report outlining in detail the process undertaken.
- 6. Meeting of the Council of Priests.**
 - The Archbishop will consult with the Council of Priests. The Council will be provided with all necessary information to come to a determination of a just cause for the modification of the parishes in the process.
- 7. The Archbishop will give consideration to the Report and the determination of the Council of Priests and, having judged there to be just cause, will issue a Decree of Modification of the Parishes.**

Novena Prayer

Mary, Mother of the Church,
stand with us at this Spirit-filled time.
Grace us with your faithful presence
as we pray, reflect and plan.

Mary, our Mother,
wrap your mantle of gentleness and courage around us.
Inspire us to say 'yes' to your Son,
as we breathe in the Spirit of Truth and Love,
to renew our communities of faith around Jesus.

Holy Mary,
you stood at the foot of the Cross, broken-hearted.
You witnessed the joy of the resurrection
and the wonder of Pentecost.
You walked great distances in your time.
Be with us now on our Synodal Journey, *Building Hope*.

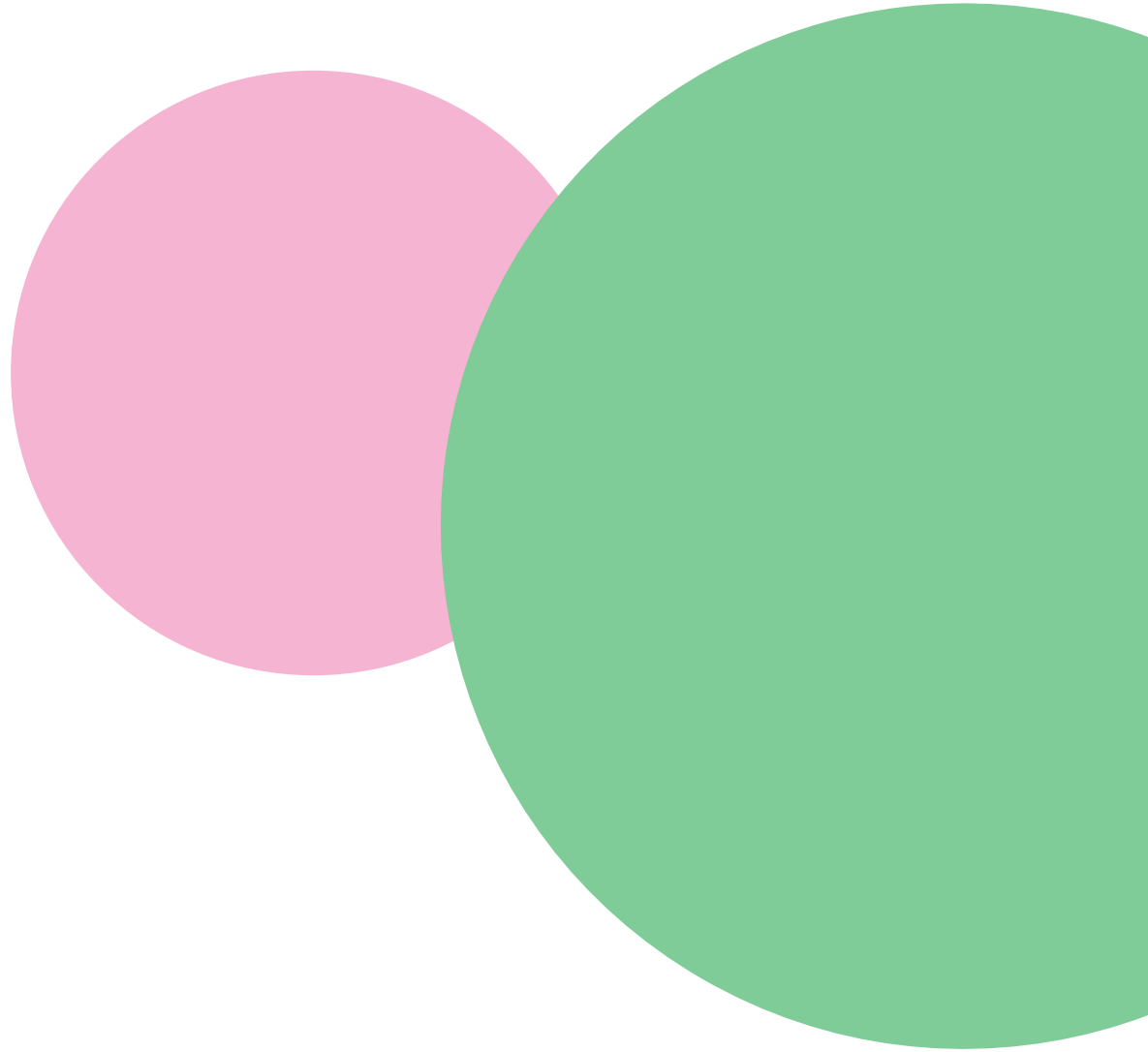
Beloved Mother,
open our hearts generously to our baptismal calling.
Encourage us into ever deepening communion
with your Son, with each other,
with those most in need, and with all of God's creation.

A Mhuire Mháthair,
hold us close to you
as we embrace God's loving invitation
to wholeness, healing and peace.
Amen.

Archdiocese of Dublin

Building Hope through Prayer, Reflection and Planning

Building Hope



Archdiocese of Dublin

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