

Risking a journey that would transform our lives and Church



In the Dublin Diocese, Archbishop Farrell is planning for a future full of hope with an innovative Pastoral Strategic Planning Resource, writes Fr Gareth Byrne

Embracing the present moment with realism, and planning for a future full of hope, go hand in hand. Archbishop Dermot Farrell, reflecting on the motto chosen by Pope Francis for the Jubilee Year 2025, 'Pilgrims of Hope', has posed a critical question: 'Hope comes to those who journey in hope... Could we risk a journey that would transform our lives, and our Church, that would bring us to a new place?'

This is the same context in which parishes and parishioners in the Archdiocese of Dublin are beginning their work, now, following workshops throughout the Diocese, on a significant new phase of the *Building Hope* pastoral renewal initiative. As 2025 begins, parish communities are opening their engagement, in a manner that reflects their own local needs and responsibilities, with the *Building Hope Pastoral Strategic Planning Resource 2025-2027: For Parishes and Partnerships of Parishes*.

The Building Hope initiative

In early 2021, new to the Archdiocese, Archbishop Farrell initiated a task force, under the title *Building Hope*, to consider how best to address the pastoral challenges facing the Diocese. Interestingly, 3,000 faith-filled individuals and groups responded to an initial survey, impacting strongly on the *Building Hope* Task Force Report. Over the last three years, the group then tasked with developing the *Building Hope* initiative surveyed and engaged further with parishes in developing a strategy for the future. Consultation, dialogue and discernment have been

essential to the process. A conscious effort was made to seek to encourage ownership of the process by individuals and faith communities throughout the Archdiocese, and shared responsibility for what is emerging. We are a faith community journeying together.

Working together in partnership

As part of the strategic planning process, priests and parishioners were asked, in 2022, to name what was working well and not so well, locally. They were then invited to advise on bringing parishes together into partnerships to ease the organisational burden on smaller numbers of people and to gain energy and momentum by working together. Lifting clergy and lay leaders beyond a sense of isolated decline and hopelessness, has been paramount. Offering people opportunities to find support, to share resources imaginatively, and to rediscover their joy, in Christ, is essential.

Building Hope in a Synodal manner

The fact that this initiative runs parallel to the synodal processes initiated worldwide by Pope Francis, and followed through on by the Irish Catholic Bishops, has been helpful. Prayer, reflection, planning and action, in a synodal manner, has become the hallmark of the *Building Hope* process. This has provided opportunities for discernment and shared action, locally, and a sense of animation across the Archdiocese

Pastoral strategic planning resource 2025-2027

Reflecting on what has already been learned, the *Building Hope Pastoral Strategic Planning Resource 2025-2027*, has emerged as a flexible planning resource. Parishes and partnerships of parishes are to prayerfully choose objectives and actions they can work on immediately, as well as naming and planning those that are a greater challenge to them. They are asked to think about the needs of all in the parish, including formation, education and training needs. Each Catholic is invited to engage in the local conversation in their parish community, to develop their faith, and to play a role in actively proclaiming God's love. As Pope Francis says in *Evangelii Gaudium*: 'All the baptised, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelisation, and it would be insufficient to envis-

age a plan of evangelisation to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients.'

Building hope with open hearts

In his pastoral letter launching this Pastoral Strategic Planning Resource, *Building Hope with Open Hearts*, Archbishop Farrell acknowledges that building hope in today's world is a challenge that requires having a heart open to the call of the Holy Spirit and to change, fully embracing creative and courageous ways of entering into conversation and planning: 'This will mean moving beyond certain worries that we might understandably have, as well as facing up to the "resistance" that often surfaces when we need to change. This is the vision of *Building Hope with Open Hearts*.'

Focus areas, objectives, suggested actions

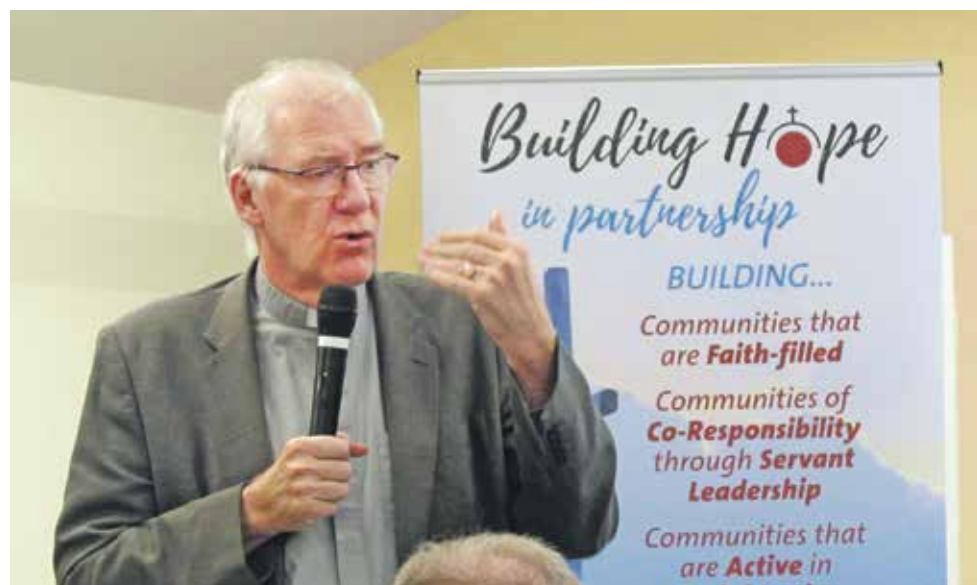
At the heart of the Christian life and of our Mission, is encounter with Jesus. The material in the *Building Hope* planning resource seeks to encourage that personal encounter, presenting four Focus Areas of a Framework for Pastoral Renewal: building communities of co-responsibility through servant leadership; communities that are active in social justice; communities of welcome and inclusion; communities that are faith-filled, centred on the person of Jesus Christ.

Within each of these four Focus Areas, objectives are laid out, developed from the conversations ongoing at all levels between 2021 and 2024. Each objective, then, provides suggested actions to be reflected on locally and chosen together in a synodal manner, adopting the cyclical method of prayer, reflection, planning and action.

Across the Focus Areas there are many suggestions and possibilities, whether on building faith-filled communities, welcoming all, reaching out to those on the margins, or affirming co-responsibility in ecclesial life. This is a dialogue that is only beginning.

Building a future together

Launching the process towards a Dublin Diocesan Pastoral Council, another welcome product of *Building Hope* in a synodal manner, Archbishop Farrell asks all who are interested to play their part in revitalising the Church, listening and learning together: 'The faithful in fact, have an instinc-



tive ability to discern the new ways that the Lord is revealing to the Church. The mission of the Church, the work of God, is not just the responsibility of the teaching Church, it is the call and responsibility of all the baptised.'

The invitation to come to know Jesus is open to all. It is a lifelong journey. We are

continually being asked to journey beyond our dryness, our fears and insecurities, our lack of experience, our lack of hope, to risk opening our hearts to renewal, to the joy of beginning again, and to transformation. May this New Year 2025 bring a fresh newness, energy and creativity to the *Building Hope*

initiative.

i Very Rev Gareth Byrne VG is Moderator of the Dublin Diocesan Curia and Chairperson of the Building Hope Pastoral Strategy Implementation Group 2021-2024. All the resources referred to here are available on the website of the Archdiocese of Dublin (dublindiocese.ie).

The Irish Catholic is looking for Promoters

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