

A PROPOSAL FOR OUR PARISH MISSION AND VISION

October 2025

PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

What is the Parish Pastoral Council?

The Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) is a faith-filled consultative group through which clergy and people work together as partners and in the ministry of servant leadership to further the mission of Christ in their own parish. Through this partnership, a vibrant Christian community, rooted in baptism and marked by its faith, worship and service, is nourished.

What Does the Parish Pastoral Council Do?

The question at the heart of the work of every Parish Pastoral Council is: where and how is God calling us to act as a Catholic community? In responding to this question, the PPC is called to do three things:

- **Review** Pastoral Matters to find out what is happening in the Parish and ask what else could be happening.
- **Reflect**, pray, discuss and discern the mission and priority areas for action for the Parish.
- **Recommend** practical ways to deliver the Parish mission and priorities.

In order to do this, the PPC will:

- Respond to the call for mission and renewal within the parish.
- Search out and respond to the hopes, ideas, needs and concerns of parishioners.
- Set long-term and short-term pastoral goals for the parish.
- Develop, implement, and improve parish initiatives to achieve these goals.
- Provide opportunities for parishioners to grow in their relationship with God and with each other.
- Encourage and support the mission of existing groups in the parish.
- Liaise with existing Parish committees, for example, Safeguarding and Finance.

Areas of Focus for a PPC:

The following are some areas in which the PPC hope to nurture and further the mission of the parish. This list is not exhaustive:

- Promote the prayer, faith, and liturgical life of the parish.
- Evangelisation and outreach.
- Catechesis and religious formation.
- Support for families and young people.
- Care for people.
- Building up good relationships with other PPC in the local area and the diocese.

Who Serves on the Parish Pastoral Council?

Members of the PPC are parishioners who are baptised, practicing the Catholic faith, in full communion with the Church, a regular attender of Mass in the Parish, supporting the Parish through giving of time, energy and finances, aware of the nature, role and work of a PPC, and understanding that he/she will be working as part of a team. The PPC members are not, however, representative of a specific community, parish or interest group, or area of concern, and the PPC does not function as a kind of parliament. They are invited to serve for a term (four years), receiving appropriate formation and meeting regularly throughout the year.

The following parishioners generously responded to the invitation by the Parish Priest to form our first Pastoral Council: Orla McCarthy (Chair), Siobhan McAree (Vice-Chair), Damien Braniff (Secretary), Teresa Hughes, Laura Kelly, Christopher Lennon, Sean McGourty, Nuala McGrattan, Joe McKeown and Caroline Savage.

What has the Parish Pastoral Council been doing?

Since its inception in September 2024, members of the PPC have been undergoing a series of training modules, provided by the Pathways to the Future Team, looking at leadership and service. These training modules have helped the members of the PPC to grow in their own life of prayer and the ability to see their own individual talents and those of the other members of the Council.

As a team, the PPC has been asking themselves how God is directing our parish mission and priorities, as it goes hand-in-hand with the mission and priorities of our Diocese. This has been a paused and thoughtful process allowing time for discussion, prayer and discernment. After a lengthy period, the PPC have developed the following mission and vision, and wish our parishioners to take time to reflect and pray about it, that together we may truly discern God's will for our parish.

Parish Context

Ardkeen is a parish on the Ards Peninsula with a long presence in the area, going back to the early 1700s when Fr Richard McTeggart celebrated the Eucharist at the Mass Rock in Ballycran. The present parish of Ardkeen, dating from 1866, stretches from the south wall of Mount Stewart Estate, on the northern side of Greyabbey, to Ardkeen corner at the junction of Rowreagh Road and Loughdoo Road, on the way to Portaferry; and from Ballywalter round the Irish Sea coast as far as Cloughey. The area is culturally, religiously and politically mixed. We have various mixed marriages and relationships and have seen a slight increase in young families settling into the area. We have three Churches, one of which is a historical building dating to 1777. There is an old school built in 1874 and an adjoining derelict schoolmaster's house. Three graveyard sites and some farmland. We have an excellent Primary School with approximately 150 pupils. We have a Catholic population of about 2000 and a Mass attendance rate of about 25%.

As with most parishes across Ireland, amongst other things due to a heightened secularisation of society, we have seen a steady drop in attendance at Mass and parish activities. Our parish, though, in recent years has shown some favourable signs of growth, especially with an increase in baptisms and a greater presence of younger families at Mass. There is also a positive participation of volunteers in the various ministries and parish groups and a keen sense of community that stayed strong during the recent Covid-19 pandemic.

MISSION: What is the mission of our Parish?

A Catholic parish exists to bring people into communion with God and one another through worship, teaching, and service. It is rooted in the wider mission of the Church, living out Christ's mission here in our specific place and time. Every member of a Parish is called, by virtue of their baptism, to the Great Commission: sent out as Christ's disciples to bring the Good News of the Gospel to all people and make disciples of all nations:

"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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Mt 28:18-20).

Therefore, the PPC would propose that our Parish Mission in Ardkeen is **to be a community united by faith, bound by the love of Christ, and committed to living out the Gospel message**. Our parish is a place where prayer, joy, and service are at the heart of all we do. We envisage a vibrant and welcoming parish that nurtures its members' faith and reaches out with compassion and joy to the wider community, witnessing the love of Christ in every action. After a period of time for your prayer and discernment, the PPC will ask for your feedback on our Mission and Vision Statement, and future ministries and activities.

PARISH MISSION PRAYER

Lord, help us to be faithful witnesses of Your love. May our parish be a place of prayer, joy, and service, where all are welcomed and we share Your love with the world. Strengthen our hearts to serve You in all we do, and may we reflect Your light to all we meet. Amen.

VISION: How do we envisage our parish in the next five years?

The PPC have been reflecting on what we would envisage our parish to be like in five year's time. After much prayer, discussion and discernment, the PPC proposes the following as our **VISION STATEMENT:**

We are a parish where Christian prayerfulness is woven into the fabric of our daily lives. Through prayer, we seek to deepen our relationship with God, growing in faith, hope, and charity. Our worship is vibrant, engaging, and reverent, creating an environment where everyone is invited to encounter the living presence of Christ.

We are a parish that radiates joy in all we do. As disciples of Christ, we are called to share the joy of the Gospel within our parish and with those we meet in the world around us. We are a community where every person, whether newcomer or longstanding member, feels welcomed, valued, and recognised as a beloved child of God.

We are a parish that actively serves the wider community. We recognise that the love of Christ drives us to serve, and we endeavour to meet the needs of those who are marginalised, suffering, or in need of support. Our service is not confined to the walls of our church but extends to every part of our community and beyond as we demonstrate the love of Christ in action.

The key elements of our vision

Prayer as the Foundation:

- We are a community grounded in prayer, both individually and collectively.
- Our liturgies are vibrant celebrations of the Eucharist, bringing together all generations to worship and give thanks.
- We offer personal and communal prayer opportunities, including daily Mass, adoration, prayer and study groups, and seasonal devotions to help deepen our relationship with God.

Welcoming:

- We are a truly Catholic parish where everyone, regardless of background, is welcomed warmly. Members of other faith communities also participate in our activities.
- Our doors are always open to those seeking spiritual support, and we actively aim to reach out to those who may feel alienated or disconnected from the Church.
- Through our Pastoral Centre, social media platforms, programmes, events, and personal outreach, we foster spaces for fellowship, mutual support, and spiritual growth.

Joyful Service:

- We are a parish that embodies the joy of the Gospel in our actions. Service is not regarded as a duty but as a joyful response to the love we have received from Christ.
- Through outreach to those in need, for example, through Trócaire and St. Vincent de Paul, visiting the sick, or supporting local initiatives, we aim to demonstrate Christ's love in our community.
- We encourage and empower parishioners to discover their unique calling in serving others, using their gifts and talents to benefit the community.

Evangelising Through Action:

- Our parish not only speaks of the Gospel, we embody it. We seize every chance to evangelise through our actions, encouraging others to meet Christ.
- We invite others to discover the transformative power of the Gospel through personal testimony, service, and the witness of our lives.
- Through our youth initiatives, we inspire each member to become a disciple of Christ in the world, sharing the joy and peace that result from a relationship with Him.

Reaching Beyond the Parish:

- We are not isolated within the walls of our parish but are an important part of the wider community.
- We work with local government and organisations to help those in need and promote justice, peace, and dignity for everyone.
- Our dedication to the poor and marginalised goes beyond our parish boundaries as we strive to promote social change that aligns with the values of the Kingdom of God.

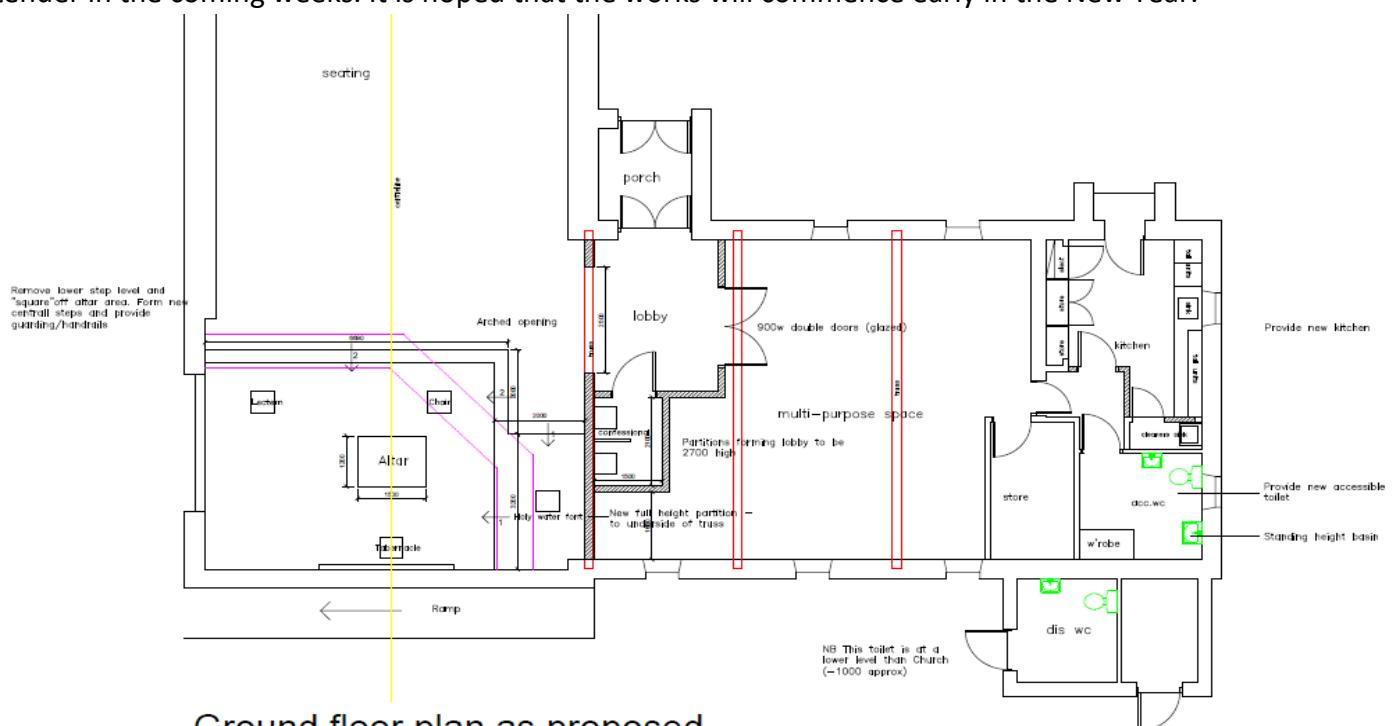
So, what are our first steps?

The introduction and formation of a Parish Pastoral Council, a new Parish Finance Committee, and regular meetings with various ministries in the Parish, is creating a momentum that the PPC is keen to tap into and encourage. There is a palpable energy and sense of hope in our parish. With a wonderful history of hospitality and social outreach in our parish, we are keen to create a space where new initiatives, some already in development, to create new groups and ministries to address the needs of our youth, young families and elderly parishioners, can congregate and begin to grow, therefore bringing our mission and vision to reality.

The Old Schoolhouse in Ballycran, is an obvious asset to develop into a *Pastoral Centre* where we would house the Parish Office, a 'holy shop', a hospitality centre and a venue for parish activities. This project is one the Parish Finance Committee will address in time, however, this is a longer term project that will inevitably require planning permissions, and other necessary approvals. In the meantime, we need a cost effective space in which we can begin our activities that will work in tandem with a future Pastoral Centre. Hence, both the PPC and the Finance Committee have looked into the possibility of using one wing of St Mary Star of the Sea Church. Mass attendance has decreased to such an extent that those attending Mass in St Mary Star of the Sea can be comfortably accommodated in the main body of the Church. Following Diocesan procedures, the Finance Committee proposed a plan, which had to be costed, and sent in for initial approval. The proposal was to create a multipurpose space where pastoral activities can be held, while maintaining it as a functional Church ensuring its longer-term viability. This space will include an accessible toilet facility, a kitchenette, sacristy storage space, and a confessional. This project, as it is indoors, does not need planning permission other than fulfilling building regulations. St Mary's has a wonderful car park and good lighting for evening activities, and it is hoped it will bring more life to this area of the parish and be a beacon of hope in the centre of the Ards Peninsula for years to come.

Once an initial approval from the Diocese was given, it was communicated to the parish for consultation. The PPC and Finance Committee thank those parishioners who raised their concerns. It is hoped that this document addresses those concerns and clarifies the need for this work in the context of the parish mission and vision, keenly aware that change can be unsettling yet often necessary to shape a sustainable future.

Below you will find a plan of the works which include reorientating the sanctuary area, as St Mary Star of the Sea once was; A larger plan is posted and will be updated on display boards in St Mary Star of the Sea as the project progresses. As is procedure, following Diocesan guidelines, the project will be going out to tender in the coming weeks. It is hoped that the works will commence early in the New Year.



Ground floor plan as proposed