



DIOCESE OF GALLOWAY

Pastoral Letter – 14 June 2026

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

“The Harvest is Plentiful, but the Labourers are Few”

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

A few months ago, I wrote to you and emphasised the word “*unsustainable*”. It was not easy to write and I am sure, not easy to read or hear. But it was important to communicate to you the real situation in the Diocese with regards to number of priests and their increased burdens. As I said then, we will have to make decisions in the short, medium and long term to ensure we are able to proclaim the Gospel in the Diocese as the Spirit asks.

For that reason, I now want to introduce another word: *sacrifice*. Specifically, I am asking you to be prepared to make sacrifices. And in the first instance, to be prepared to sacrifice two things (if you haven’t already):

- Having a resident priest
- Having a guaranteed weekly Mass in each church

Already, parishes that have traditionally had a resident priest have had to learn to share one with a neighbouring parish (or even more). This can be a wrench, and understandably so, because the presence of the priest can mean a lot to a community. But, by necessity, this cannot always happen and, as priest numbers reduce for the moment, so will the number of parishes with resident priests.

To give context, last September there were 18 priests under the retirement age of 75 for the whole Diocese. By this September there will be 15. It simply means that fewer priests will be asked to look after more parishes. (With you I continue to be grateful for their ministry and the dedication they show to you and the Lord. I am also grateful to you for your support of all the clergy and ask you to continue to do so.)

This will inevitably lead to the second sacrifice I ask of you: to be willing to deal with Sunday Masses being offered in different places and at different times. In many cases, we have become used to Sunday Mass being celebrated at a time and place that suits us. Some of these will have to change, which might also mean a parish not having a weekly Sunday Mass.

We all understand the value of Mass as a parish community celebration and how it nourishes the parish but, at the moment, we must deal with the reality we are in. And it gives the added challenge of retaining the existence of parishes as communities of faith without the same easy access to the

Sunday Mass as in the past. It means also seeing ourselves as part of a broader Church and not just a parish.

In direct terms, this means that your attachment to the Mass might not be limited to one particular celebration but, instead, wherever and whenever you are able to attend and worship. I am therefore asking you to be prepared to sacrifice what has become your routine of Mass to accepting the inconvenience and difficulty of the places and times of Mass celebrations being changed in ways that might not suit you at first.

There is a limit to the number of Masses priests can celebrate, especially since they do not simply “go through the motions” but put great effort, energy and emotion into what is at the heart of the life of the Church. As a rule, priests should celebrate Mass once per day but, in exceptional cases, they can celebrate up to three with my permission.

For this reason, I am instructing the clergy in each deanery to make proposals to coordinate the best possible spread of Masses across each area and to engage you in these discussions. I expect this to begin in the coming months and proposals be made by the end of September. Once we have the chance to examine these proposals together in the Autumn, we can seek to find the best way to produce the best spread of Masses across the Diocese.

These sacrifices I invite you to make are ways for us to use our resources best at the service of Christ and his Church so that we can continue to reflect on how the Spirit wants us to proclaim the Gospel and celebrate the Sacraments in the years ahead. I firmly believe that the Lord will turn these sacrifices to the good and I ask you to believe the same.

At the same time, I ask you to continue to do what Christ demands in today’s Gospel:

“Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest”.

And remember that we are in God’s hands. We make these decisions and we offer these sacrifices because they are rooted in Christian Hope knowing that we do not do this alone but in the Lord.

As today’s psalm remind us: “We are **his** people, the sheep of **his** flock”.

With prayers for you all and asking your prayers for me,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Francis Dougan', with a cross at the end of the line.

+ Francis Dougan
Bishop of Galloway