



Message to the People of the Diocese of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora and the Diocese of Clonfert

We have been informed by the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Okolo, that in the near future the Holy Father Pope Francis intends to appoint a single Bishop to the Diocese of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora and the Diocese of Clonfert.

This form of union of two dioceses under one Bishop is not an amalgamation and does not suppress either of the two dioceses. Both dioceses will continue to maintain their own integrity and autonomy as is but will work closer together, where possible, through the person and ministry of a single Bishop (*in persona episcopi*).*

As the Holy See continues its consultations on the matter, we will be organising meetings at various levels in each diocese to inform the People of God and talk to them about it.

We pray God's blessings on our respective dioceses at this important time and we look forward to a closer working together towards a new springtime of faith within each of our diocesan and parish communities.

+ *Brendan Kelly*
Bishop of Galway,
Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora

+ *Michael Duignan*
Bishop of Clonfert

Bringing Two or More Dioceses Together *in persona episcopi

The Latin term *in persona episcopi* literally means “in the person of the bishop” and is used by the Catholic Church to designate the union of two or more dioceses, under one bishop. In fact, the determining factor in this case is that both dioceses are pastorally governed by a sole bishop. The diocesan structures and institutions (cathedral churches, cathedral chapters, curial offices and officials, college of consultors, presbyteral council, diocesan pastoral councils, etc), diocesan goods (lands, bank accounts, cultural properties, etc) and juridical competences in Canon Law and Civil Law (trusteeship, charities, etc.) of each of the respective dioceses are left unaltered.

In other words, the only change is that, instead of each diocese having its own respective bishop, one sole bishop exercises the pastoral governance of both dioceses equally, according to the spiritual and pastoral needs of the one and the other.

Each diocese maintains its identity and handles its own cultural heritage as it deems fit. Each keeps its own personnel or can share with other dioceses; priests will not normally be asked to minister beyond their own diocese unless by a special request or mandate. Each diocese will handle its financial administration independently and will make its own pastoral decisions as usual. Of course, the mutual cooperation between both dioceses, as has been hitherto the case, is not excluded. In fact, constant consultation, support and sharing of expertise ought to be encouraged. From the experience of other dioceses where this has been in place, there is evidence that many factors enhance the future survival of the dioceses which unite and cooperate *in persona episcopi*.

This form of union under one bishop is not an amalgamation and does not suppress either of the two dioceses. It respects the autonomy and allows for the functionality of the individual jurisdictions. It is a mild and practical form of union between dioceses and can be a temporary or permanent provision.