

Pastoral Message

Update on Amalgamation of Our Dioceses



Message from Bishop Kevin


Dear Parishioners of the Dioceses of Achonry and Elphin,

As you may remember, we held six synodal gatherings in September and October of 2024, to explore the implications of the proposed joining of our two dioceses. Over five hundred people participated in the consultation, and the report was published in November 2024, together with a pastoral message from me. A good deal has happened since then and I wanted to provide you with an update.

What has happened since November 2024?

- In February 2025, Pope Francis appointed me Bishop of Achonry, while remaining Bishop of Elphin. I was installed in the Cathedral of the Annunciation and St. Nathy, on 30th March. At the same time, the two dioceses of Achonry and Elphin were united "in persona episcopi" (in the person of the bishop).
- A joint implementation group, formed of lay people, clergy and religious from the two dioceses was established, to make recommendations as to what steps need to be taken to progress the unification of the two dioceses.
- We established a single committee to plan various initiatives for the Jubilee of Hope.
- We arranged four joint pilgrimages, one to Knock, one to Lourdes, and two to Rome, one of which was for young adults participating in the Jubilee of Hope and also took in a walking pilgrimage to the tomb of St. Columbanus in Bobbio, northern Italy.

continued overleaf



Outside the Irish College, Rome during the Youth Pilgrimage to Italy

- Staff and volunteers of our two ACCORD Centres (for the support of Marriage) had already met together in 2024, and progress is advanced towards combining the resources of the two Centres into one new Centre.
- Achonry and Elphin have now registered as one single entity for Garda Vetting purposes, meaning that those vetted from Summer 2025 are vetted for both dioceses.
- Rather than having two separate Synodal Teams, we now have one Synodal Team made up of lay people, clergy and religious from both dioceses.
- A facilitated assembly for all the Parish Pastoral Councils across the two dioceses was held in November 2025 and attended by over two hundred people.
- The first joint in-service Conference for Priests was held in November 2025, providing the priests with an opportunity to learn together and to mix socially.
- Priests of both dioceses now gather together for shared Retreats and Days of Recollection.
- Priests and lay people have gathered in both Cathedrals for the Chrism Mass and other significant liturgical celebrations.



Pilgrimage to St Peter's Basilica Holy Door during the Youth Pilgrimage to Italy



Bishop Kevin is installed as Bishop of Achonry



Pilgrimage to Knock

- Our Social Media accounts have been merged and our "handle" is @achonryelphin on Facebook, X and Instagram.
- A new OCIA project (Order of Christian Initiation of Adults) has been established across both dioceses to provide the necessary support and accompaniment for adults who wish to become Catholic or to complete their Christian initiation.
- Each diocese has a panel for the redeployment of Primary School Teachers who become surplus in their own schools due to changes in enrolment. From January 2026, there will be one single panel across the two dioceses.
- The working name of the two dioceses together is "Dioceses of Achonry and Elphin" and the Bishop is known as the "Bishop of Achonry and of Elphin".
- Following consultation, a priest of Elphin is now ministering as Administrator of the Parish of Ballisodare (Achonry).
- While the financial structures of the two dioceses remain separate, at least for the moment, work continues to ensure that our financial processes mirror one another more closely, in order to facilitate the merging of the two dioceses. The same firm of Accountants is now carrying out the annual audit for both dioceses.



Priests outside Ballaghaderreen Cathedral prior to Installation Mass



Members of Parish Pastoral Councils meet for joint assembly



Pilgrims in Rome during the Autumn Pilgrimage

How Come We Haven't Noticed All of This?



Members of Parish Pastoral Councils meet for joint assembly

I am conscious that most parishioners in Achonry and in Elphin will not have noticed much change on the ground. In many ways, that is good news, because much of the change is at diocesan level and our parishes continue to function effectively and to provide the pastoral care that people need on a daily basis. The kind of change that we need to see when merging two dioceses is primarily organic growth. It is like the change that you see in your children, or indeed in your garden, or on the farm. It happens slowly over time, but it is real growth. If there is structural change, it has to be focussed on supporting spiritual growth and the maturing of our parish communities.

What makes all of this possible is the generous commitment of so many people who are actively involved, not only in the day-to-day operation of both Achonry and Elphin, but in the process of drawing them together into one. I take this opportunity to thank the priests, lay staff, volunteers, religious sisters and deacons, as well as professional people working in the various agencies which serve our two dioceses.

People sometimes say: "Bishop Kevin, you must be very busy", and yes, that is true. Time management is challenging, and I am doing about 1,000km per week on the road. I want to reassure you that I am happy, and I am enjoying the opportunity to visit parishes, to meet parishioners and to support the priests. I plan on celebrating all of the Confirmations in 2026, because I love meeting the young people and their families and sharing the gift of the Holy Spirit with them. I think most of you will understand, however, that I will not be able to get to everything that is going on.

Looking to the Future

From a practical and pastoral point of view, there is still a good deal that needs to be done. The work in which we are engaged is God's work, and the only way we can achieve what He wants is by listening to His Word in our hearts and by asking for the guidance of His Spirit. Please keep our two dioceses in your prayer and keep me also in your prayer.

May I take this opportunity to wish you every blessing during this season of Advent, which is a time of active waiting. As we welcome the child whose birth we celebrate at Christmas, may his Spirit help us to walk with Him in the year ahead.

✠ **Kevin Doran**

Bishop of Achonry and of Elphin

14th December 2025

Gaudete Sunday



Volunteers on the Pilgrimage to Lourdes



Pilgrimage to Lourdes