

# Pope Francis appoints Fr Donal Roche as Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Dublin

On, Tuesday, March 5, 2024, the Holy Father Pope Francis appointed Fr Donal Roche, a priest of the Archdiocese of Dublin, as Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Dublin. Please find below an **overview of the life and ministry of Fr Roche** as well as the statements of **Archbishop Farrell** and **Fr Roche**.



Archbishop Farrell with Fr Donal Roche in St Mary's Pro-Cathedral, March 5, 2024

## Fr Donal Roche: Life and Ministry

Born in 1958 to Sheila and Joe Roche, Fr Roche grew up in Drimnagh in Dublin, one of a family of seven children. He attended both primary and secondary school at Drimnagh Castle CBS.

Fr Roche worked for four years as a clerical officer in Dublin County Council before entering Clonliffe College in 1980 to study for the priesthood. He was sent to Maynooth to study for a degree in theology and was ordained for the Archdiocese of Dublin in 1986 in his home parish of Mourne Road.

His first appointment was a period of six years as a priest-teacher in Coláiste Dhúlaigh, Coolock. He then spent five years as a diocesan adviser for religious education in primary schools. This was followed by eight years as chaplain to St Mark's Community School, Tallaght. After a total of 19 years involved in religious education, he still retains a great interest in the evangelisation of young people and has an active involvement in sacramental preparation programmes. During this time, Fr Roche also served for about six years as assistant vocations director in the Archdiocese.

Fr Roche's first parish appointment was in Lucan South, where he spent seven years. This was a time of broadening the experience of ministry beyond schools to accompany people of all ages on the journey of faith, from baptisms, weddings and funerals to the everyday experiences of parish life, building and strengthening the faith life of the community.

This was followed by 11 years in Wicklow Town, also looking after the surrounding areas of Kilbride, Barndarrig and Brittas Bay for four of those years. This mixture of town and rural areas gave him a great experience of the richness of the Archdiocese and its many different and distinct communities.

His current appointment is in the Cabinteely-Johnstown grouping of parishes, with additional responsibility for the growing area of Cherrywood. This provides the new challenge of creating a Catholic community in an area where there is no plan for a church building but many people who wish to belong to the Church.

Fr Roche was appointed Episcopal Vicar by then Archbishop of Dublin Diarmuid Martin in 2019 and continues in this role under Archbishop Farrell, with responsibility for the deaneries of Bray, Donnybrook and Wicklow. This is very much a pastoral role, supporting priests and parishioners in times of challenge and times of celebration.

Fr Roche is a fluent Irish speaker and is often called on to celebrate Mass and the sacraments in Irish in various parts of the Archdiocese.

His appointment as Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin brings a new challenge in these changing times. With fewer clergy and greater lay involvement in parishes, the new Auxiliary Bishop will be supporting the Archbishop in his role of leading the Archdiocese along the synodal pathway: clergy and lay faithful working together to bring the message of the Gospel to a new generation.

An Auxiliary Bishop is given a titular see. Fr Roche's will be that of the ancient diocese of *Cell Ausaille*, which is situated in the area of Killashee near Naas, Co. Kildare. St Auxilius was said to be a nephew of St Patrick and there are monastic ruins in Killashee that are believed to date back to the fifth century.

# Statement of Archbishop Dermot Farrell

I am very pleased that Pope Francis has appointed Fr Donal Roche as Titular Bishop of *Cell Ausaille* and Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin.

In light of the rapidly changing needs of the Archdiocese, I asked Pope Francis to consider appointing an Auxiliary Bishop to assist me in the ministry to a diocese that has a population of over 1.5 million, of whom a million identify as Catholics, spread over 197 parishes. Today I give thanks for the appointment of Fr Donal Roche. To the leadership of the Church in Dublin, Fr Donal brings extensive pastoral experience, as well as an inspiring personal witness and fidelity to the gospel. I am very grateful to the Holy Father, Pope Francis, and to His Excellency Archbishop Montemayor, Apostolic Nuncio to Ireland, for facilitating my request.

I thank Fr Donal for generously accepting this new call to leadership responsibility in the Church. Since his ordination to priesthood in 1986, Father Donal has made a significant contribution to the life of the Church in Dublin as priest-teacher, priest, episcopal vicar, and, most recently, as Vicar General. My ministry – as priest and bishop in these challenging times for the Church in Ireland and for our mission, has brought me to the conviction that when we are open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, new life and hope comes to our parishes. Just as the Lord waited for Mary's "Yes", so the Lord waits for ours. The word of the Lord is an invitation; it is a call, and God is as patient as he is faithful and true. May the Holy Spirit inspire, strengthen, and guide Fr Donal as he is called to be a bishop in this time of fundamental, far-reaching renewal of the Church's life.

Since the appointment of the first Auxiliary Bishop in Dublin in 1883, the Auxiliary Bishops have made a significant contribution to the life of the diocese. I have no doubt Fr Donal will bring his many gifts, fresh ideas and deep motivation to the Church's work – that of proclaiming the promise and hope of the Gospel, and witnessing to joy and consolation in this time and place.

May we carry Fr Donal in our prayer, not only in coming weeks and months, but in the years of his episcopal ministry which are about to begin. May the Lord keep him close to Himself all the days of his life.

## Statement of Fr Donal Roche

I want to express my gratitude to His Holiness Pope Francis for the honour he has bestowed on me by calling me to serve as Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin. And I thank Archbishop Montemayor, the Papal Nuncio, and Archbishop Farrell for the trust they have placed in me by supporting that call to serve as an Auxiliary Bishop in the Archdiocese. It is an honour that I feel is undeserved, but it is also a challenge that I take up willingly, if nervously. I will be hoping for and very much dependent on the support of the priests and people of the diocese.

I have served as a priest in Dublin for 38 years, since my ordination in my home parish of Mourne Road in 1986, spending the first half of that time in schools in Coolock and Tallaght as priest-teacher and chaplain, and a spell as an adviser for religious education. I was also assistant director of vocations for about six years during this time.

I then served in the parishes of Lucan South, Wicklow-Rathnew, Kilbride-Barndarrig, and currently Cabinteely. I am extremely grateful to the people in all of these parishes for their kindness, their friendship, their support and their encouragement. Throughout all those years I have been sustained and supported by my own faith in God and by the faith, support, kindness and care of the people I worked with. I have been blessed with a loving and supportive family and I am very grateful to my two sisters and four brothers as well as my numerous nieces and nephews for their support and love. They have been a rock of strength for me.

As I take up this new challenge, I am very aware of my limitations, but I am also aware of the strength that comes from God, a strength that has sustained me many times in the past. I take great consolation from the words of St Paul to the Corinthians: "I am content with weakness, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Cor. 12:9-10). Setting out on this new path, I put my trust in God, and I pray for God's wisdom and strength to guide me as I take on this new role in his Church.

Everybody says that these are challenging times for the Church and that is true. We have been through difficult times over the last 20 years or so and the path that lies ahead is also very uncertain. But we have a strength in the commitment and faith of the priests and people of the Archdiocese who draw nourishment from the Gospel of Jesus Christ and who are engaged in the process of *Building Hope* for the future. I have seen that faith and commitment in action in all the parishes and communities I have been involved in over the years.

As I accept the call today to be an Auxiliary Bishop, I pledge my support to Archbishop Farrell, and I promise to devote myself to the service of the priests and people of the Archdiocese. I can say with complete honesty that I still have the same enthusiasm for the ministry today that I had at the start, despite all the ups and downs and upheavals of recent years. Being a priest has been my greatest joy and privilege and I hope I can continue to share that joy with the people I work with for many years to come. Hope and joy in ministry is my greatest strength.

And so with the strength that comes from the Gospel and the Eucharist, the strength that supported the holy men and women who walked this way before us (including St Kieran, whose feast we celebrate today), I take on this task and pray that God will continue to give me health and strength to spread his word and preach his Gospel to the very best of my ability.