

Commission on Episcopal Ministry and Structures

DIOCESAN BOUNDARIES OPENING THE DISCUSSION

Presented to General Synod 2015

This leaflet focusses on one aspect of the Commission's remit. For a full review of work on episcopal ministry and structures, please refer to the Book of Reports.

Introduction

The Commission on Episcopal Ministry and Structures was established in 2012 by a Statute of the General Synod (Chapter II of 2012). Its remit is to prepare proposals for the General Synod on appropriate future arrangements for episcopal ministry and structures for the Church of Ireland. Amongst the many issues to be considered are diocesan structures and geographical boundaries.

With this leaflet alongside its formal report, the Commission invites members of the General Synod to reflect on these issues and join a discussion on possible changes in diocesan boundaries. We will listen carefully to what is said as we move to our next step, which is consultation with diocesan councils later this year. The Commission will learn from the ideas and concerns shared and then bring proposals to the General Synod in 2016.

Some previous attempts to amalgamate dioceses or change boundaries have been rejected by diocesan synods or the General Synod. Some proposals have been implemented but at too great a cost in distress, energy and time. There is no doubt that this aspect of the Commission's work asks hard questions of all of us. Even though the task is difficult, however, the Commission is convinced that unless we face up to these issues, the objectives of the General Synod in 2012 cannot be achieved: to provide episcopal ministry and structures fit for mission in the 21st century.

The Commission believes that any changes proposed should be visionary and principled, and based on sound evidence. For that reason, we have prepared a set of *Principles* and general guidelines to underpin recommendations, and we have collected statistical information from the church census of 2013 and the two state censuses of 2011. (In the latter case this involved some calculation as the state censuses are obviously not conducted with Church of Ireland boundaries in mind.)

The Commission presents here an analysis of the current arrangements and some examples of how the structure could be adjusted. **We emphasise that these are only examples. They are not alternatives from which either the Commission or the General Synod must choose.** The discussion at General Synod will help the Commission when it is consulting further with dioceses and then framing proposals for the Synod to consider next year.

Mrs Ethne Harkness
Chairman, Commission on Episcopal Ministry and Structures

Acknowledgement

We wish to acknowledge with thanks the kindness of the National Roads Authority in the Republic of Ireland for permitting us to use their maps for this leaflet. The Commission felt it was important when considering diocesan boundaries and the examples listed, to take into account the existing transport infrastructure (particularly in the West of Ireland) and the NRA maps helped us to do that.

Vision, Principles and Working Guidelines

The *Vision* of the Commission on Episcopal Ministry and Structures is “to provide an episcopacy that will allow the Church of Ireland to fulfil its mission in the 21st century:-

- by enabling bishops to lead the Church – clergy and laity – in living the Christian life, furthering the mission of the Church and building the Kingdom of God;
- by learning from our history, the experience of other Churches and the expertise of leaders and directors in other roles and adapting those lessons to benefit episcopal ministry;
- by providing episcopal structures that are authoritative, accountable, supportive and encouraging, and flexible enough to meet present needs and provide for evolution in our understanding of ministry and mission; and
- by valuing the richness of our inheritance as a national and Anglican church and at the same time recognizing current realities in our ecumenical, political, cultural, social and economic life.”

The following *Principles* have been developed to govern recommendations in relation to Dioceses.

“Arrangements in relation to diocesan structures and geographical boundaries should:-

- provide flexibility for future shapes of mission and ministry;
- recognize that different structures may be appropriate for different places;
- acknowledge that a range of gifts, skills, expertise and experience and significant commitment of time and energy are required to support the worshipping and functioning life of a diocese;
- aim towards providing appropriate representation for each diocese in decision-making by central church bodies;
- give due regard to historic diocesan identities and their ecumenical significance;
- reflect established, cohesive communities and current centres of worship, mission and population;
- address the implications of a multiplicity of cathedrals;
- present an overall sustainable financial model, taking account of reasonable calls on parishioners, diocese and central church funds;
- offer the incumbent bishop a sustainable context for his or her episcopal ministry; and
- examine and offer ways of resolving the consequences of any proposals for change.”

The Commission has adopted *Working Guidelines* in relation to appropriate numbers of population, worshippers and cures to enhance diocesan capacity and meet CEMS *Principles*. Following those guidelines, the examples used in this booklet have the following features:-

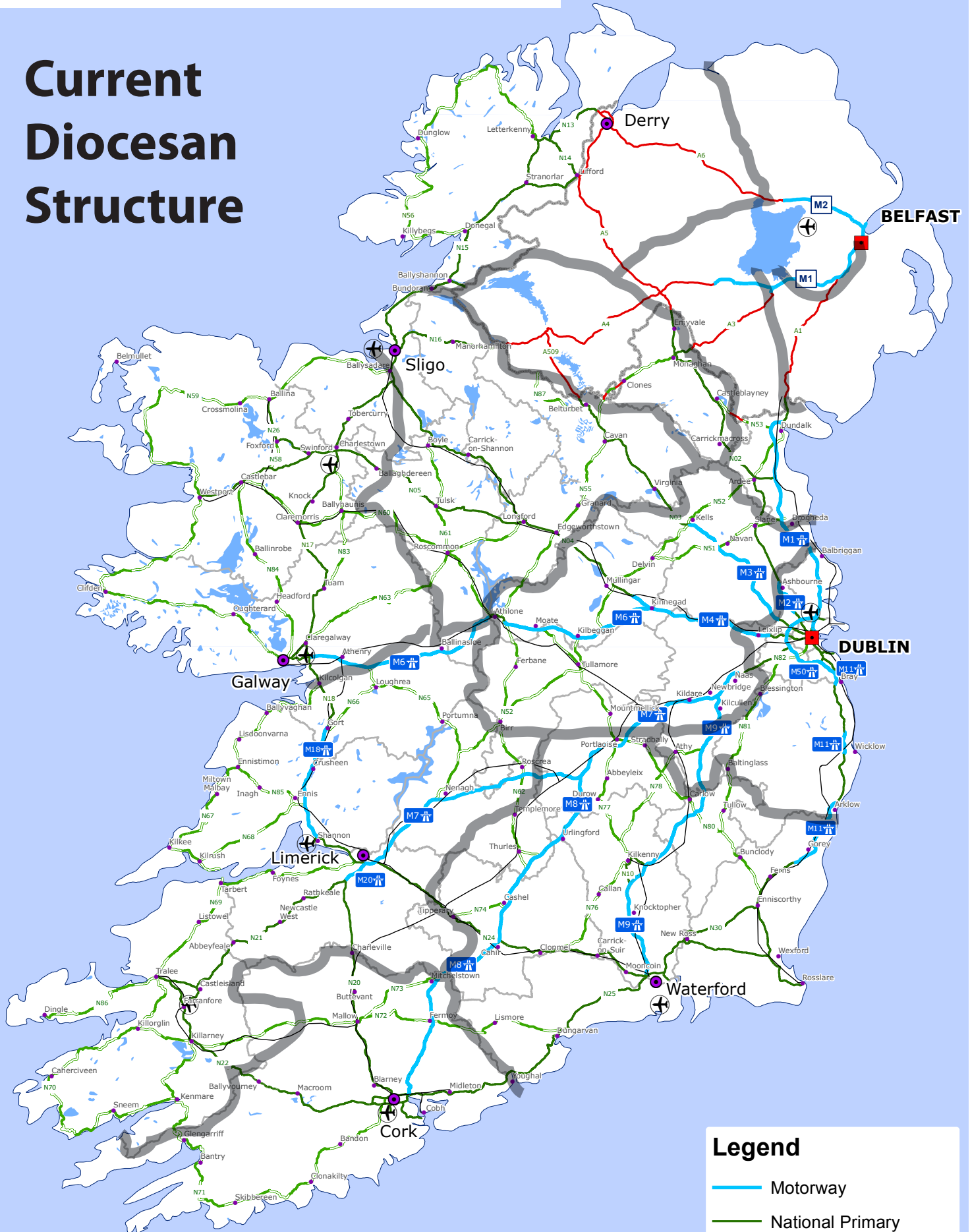
- a diocese should have as a minimum 15,000 Church of Ireland members in its area;
- with an average attendance rate of 15.5% of membership, that means 2,325 (rounded to 2,500) worshippers in the diocese on a typical Sunday;
- the minimum number of cures in a diocese should be 30;
- that generally means at least 80 worshippers in each cure on a typical Sunday.

Historic Church of Ireland Dioceses

1. The traditional diocesan boundaries of the Church of Ireland and the Roman Catholic Church are possibly the most enduring geographical entities in Ireland, dating from the Synod of Ráthbreasail in 1111. At that time the Irish Church adopted a diocesan instead of a monastic structure and the units were based on factors such as the petty kingdoms of the day, the location of monastic centres, and physical convenience. There was some restructuring by later reforming Irish Synods, notably the Synod of Kells in 1152, but we still recognize today what are essentially the boundaries defined in 1111. People identify with the historic boundaries; they remind us of our shared Christian heritage, support ecumenical relationships and give us a sense of continuity and belonging. The Commission view is that they should continue to form the basis of any restructuring.
2. In the years following the Reformation, changes were made to the diocesan structure by the Irish and UK Parliaments. The most significant alterations were made by the Church Temporalities Act of 1833 which reduced the number of Church of Ireland bishoprics from 22 to 12 and the number of Archbishops from 4 to 2. While this is the same number of bishoprics and Archbishops as today, the dioceses established in 1833 have not remained unchanged.
3. Following disestablishment of the Church in 1870, the Church of Ireland became responsible for its own governance and several Commissions and Committees of the Church have examined diocesan structures. The current diocesan structure substantially dates from the work of the Commission on Episcopal Needs in the 1970s. That group recommended a structure of 11 dioceses. Most of their recommendations on reorganisation were accepted and implemented but their proposal for unifying Tuam, Killala and Achonry with Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh was ultimately rejected. The proposals of the 1998 Commission on Episcopal Needs for a structure of 10 dioceses were rejected.
4. On the opposite page is a map dating from the early 20th century showing all the traditional 32 dioceses of the Church.

Ireland Road Network

Current Diocesan Structure



Legend

- Motorway
- National Primary
- National Secondary
- Northern Ireland Roads
- Railways

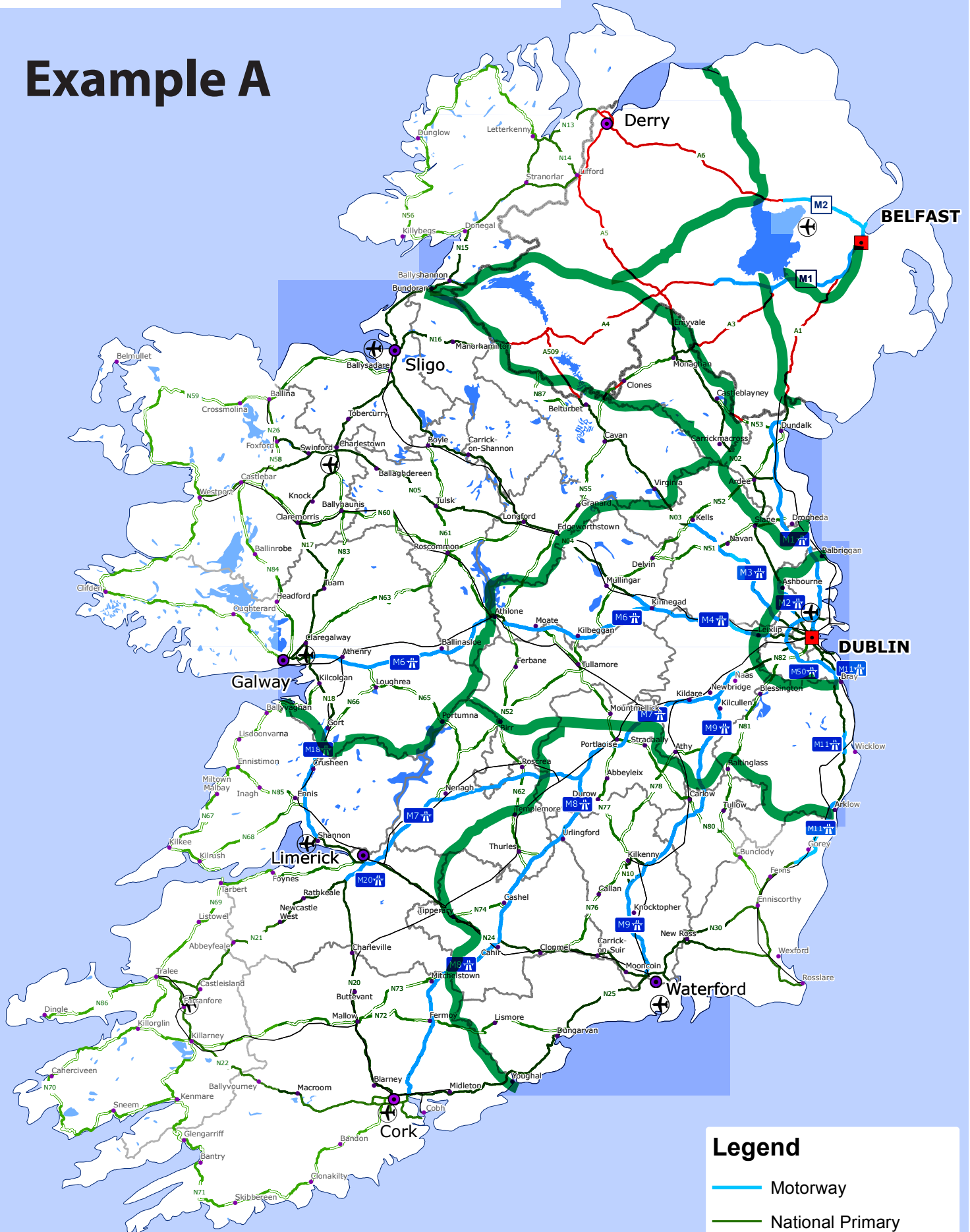
The Current Diocesan Structure

1. The current diocesan structure consists of 12 dioceses, 7 in the Northern Province and 5 in the Southern Province.
2. The dioceses vary greatly in population size. The largest is Connor with a population of 85,540 in 74 cures. The smallest is Tuam, Killala and Achonry with a population of 6,710 in 9 cures. In terms of average Church attendance on the three Sundays surveyed in 2013, the largest average attendance was in Down and Dromore (12,731), the smallest was in Tuam, Killala and Achonry (612).
3. The percentage average attendance (that is the average attendance in a diocese as a percentage of the estimated Church of Ireland population in the same diocese) varies markedly across the island. The highest percentage attendance is in what can broadly be described as the 'border region'. The two highest percentage attendances are in Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh at 23.5% and Clogher at 22.2%. The two lowest percentage attendances are in Tuam, Killala and Achonry at 9.1% and Limerick and Killaloe at 11.7%. The average attendance across the Island is 15.5%.
4. In terms of meeting the working guidelines adopted by the Commission, only 7 of the 12 dioceses satisfy them all. These are Armagh, Clogher, Derry and Raphoe, Down and Dromore, Connor, Dublin and Glendalough and Cashel, Ferns and Ossory. All of the other dioceses are short of the objectives in all three categories (total population, attendance at worship and number of cures).
5. The Commission asks members of the General Synod to consider the implications of this picture. We suggest that the current structure means the Church in some dioceses is relying too much on too few people to sustain an existing system. While the commitment, dedication and generosity of those working so hard to maintain the present arrangements must be acknowledged with real appreciation, we suggest that a mission focus now requires significant change in episcopal ministry and structures.

Diocese	COI Population (2011)	Attendance (2013)	Attendance as a % of population	Cures	Church Buildings	Schools (ROI only)
Armagh	34,420	7,102	20.6%	43	89	2
Clogher	17,780	3,951	22.2%	32	72	5
Derry and Raphoe	36,480	6,066	16.6%	48	121	21
Down and Dromore	84,290	12,731	15.1%	75	119	-
Connor	85,540	10,815	12.6%	74	116	-
Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh	9,950	2,343	23.5%	23	99	20
Tuam, Killala and Achonry	6,710	612	9.1%	9	30	5
Dublin and Glendalough	46,930	7,252	15.5%	56	105	48
Meath and Kildare	10,750	1,463	13.6%	17	58	16
Cashel, Ferns and Ossory	19,230	2,540	13.2%	33	147	27
Cork, Cloyne and Ross	13,990	2,197	15.7%	22	71	21
Limerick and Killaloe	10,310	1,205	11.7%	17	63	11
Total:	376,380	58,277	15.5%	449	1,090	176

Ireland Road Network

Example A



Legend

- Motorway
- National Primary
- National Secondary
- Northern Ireland Roads
- Railways

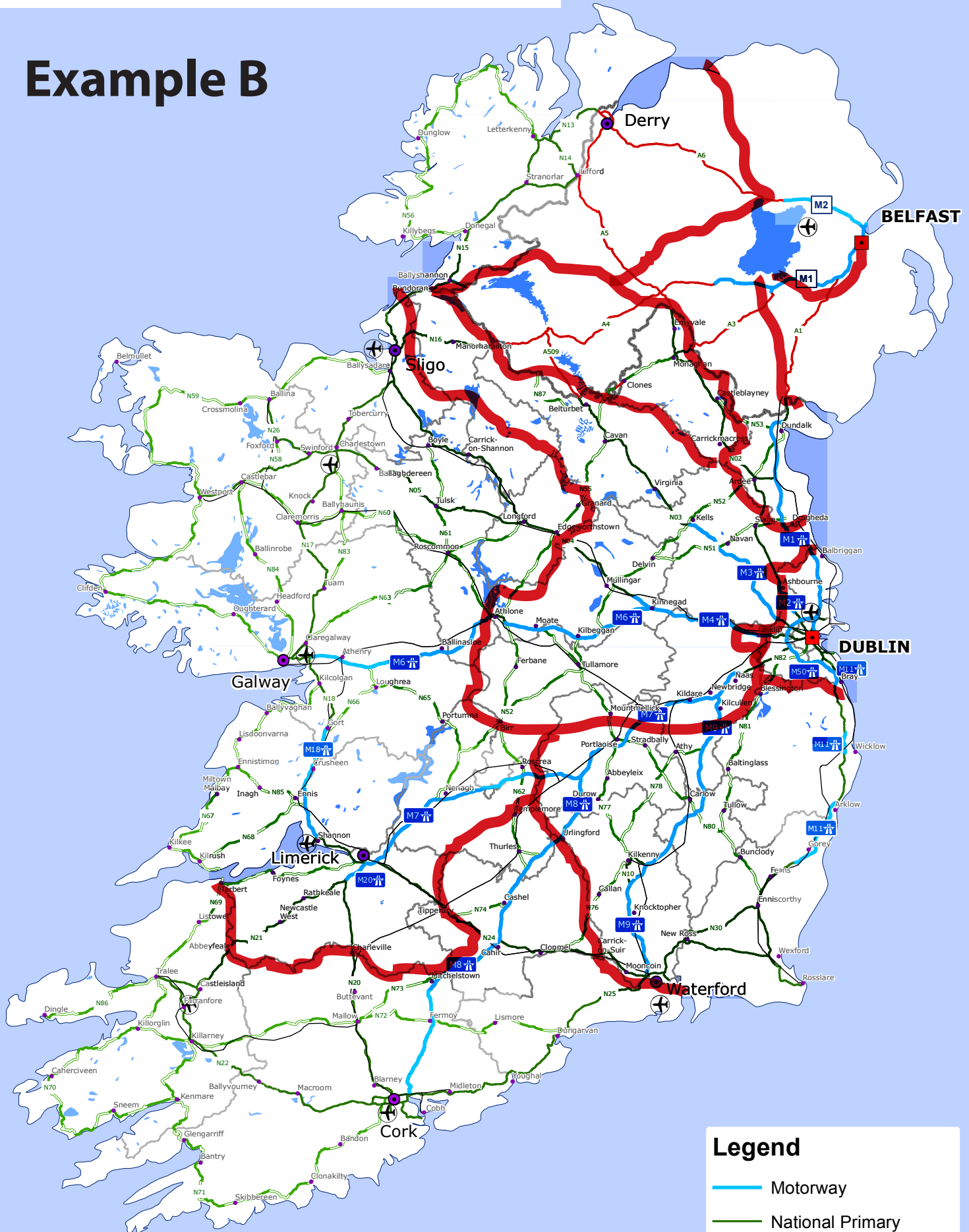
Example A

1. Example A envisages a merging of Meath, Kildare and Glendalough; Tuam, Killala and Achonry and Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh; and Cork, Cloyne, Ross and Limerick & Killaloe. The only adjustment separate from this would be the move of the dioceses of Clonfert and Kilmacduagh (just west of Athlone) from the Diocese of Limerick and Killaloe to the Diocese of Tuam, Killlala and Achonry.
2. Example A achieves all the guidelines set by the Commission. It would result in 10 dioceses, 5 in the Northern Province and 5 in the Southern Province. There could be a ‘tweaking’ period allowing parishes to recommend that they be considered for moving to an alternative neighbouring diocese, if they feel that joining that diocese would be better in terms of transportation/communications links.
3. While Example A results in a large diocese in the West, it is arguably a more compact and manageable-sized diocese than other examples that may be put forward. In the West of Ireland, East-West Transportation and Communications Links tend to be better than North-South Links (for example, almost all rail links in the West of Ireland are East-West). The Commission therefore suggests that this example might allow for better use of current transportation and communications links in the West of Ireland than others.

Diocese	COI Population (2011)	Attendance (2013)	Cures	Church Buildings	Schools (ROI only)
Armagh	34,420	7,102	43	89	2
Down and Dromore	84,290	12,731	75	119	-
Connor	85,540	10,815	74	116	-
Derry and Raphoe	36,480	6,066	48	121	21
Clogher	17,780	3,951	32	72	5
Dublin	35,500	5,444	41	64	34
Meath, Kildare and Glendalough	22,180	3,271	32	99	30
Tuam, Killala and Achonry, Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh, Clonfert and Kilmacduagh	17,710	3,084	34	138	26
Cashel, Ferns and Ossory	19,230	2,540	33	147	27
Cork, Cloyne and Ross, Limerick and Killaloe and Kilfenora (except Clonfert)	23,250	3,273	37	125	31
Total	376,380	58,277	449	1090	176

Ireland Road Network

Example B



Legend

- Motorway
- National Primary
- National Secondary
- Northern Ireland Roads
- Railways

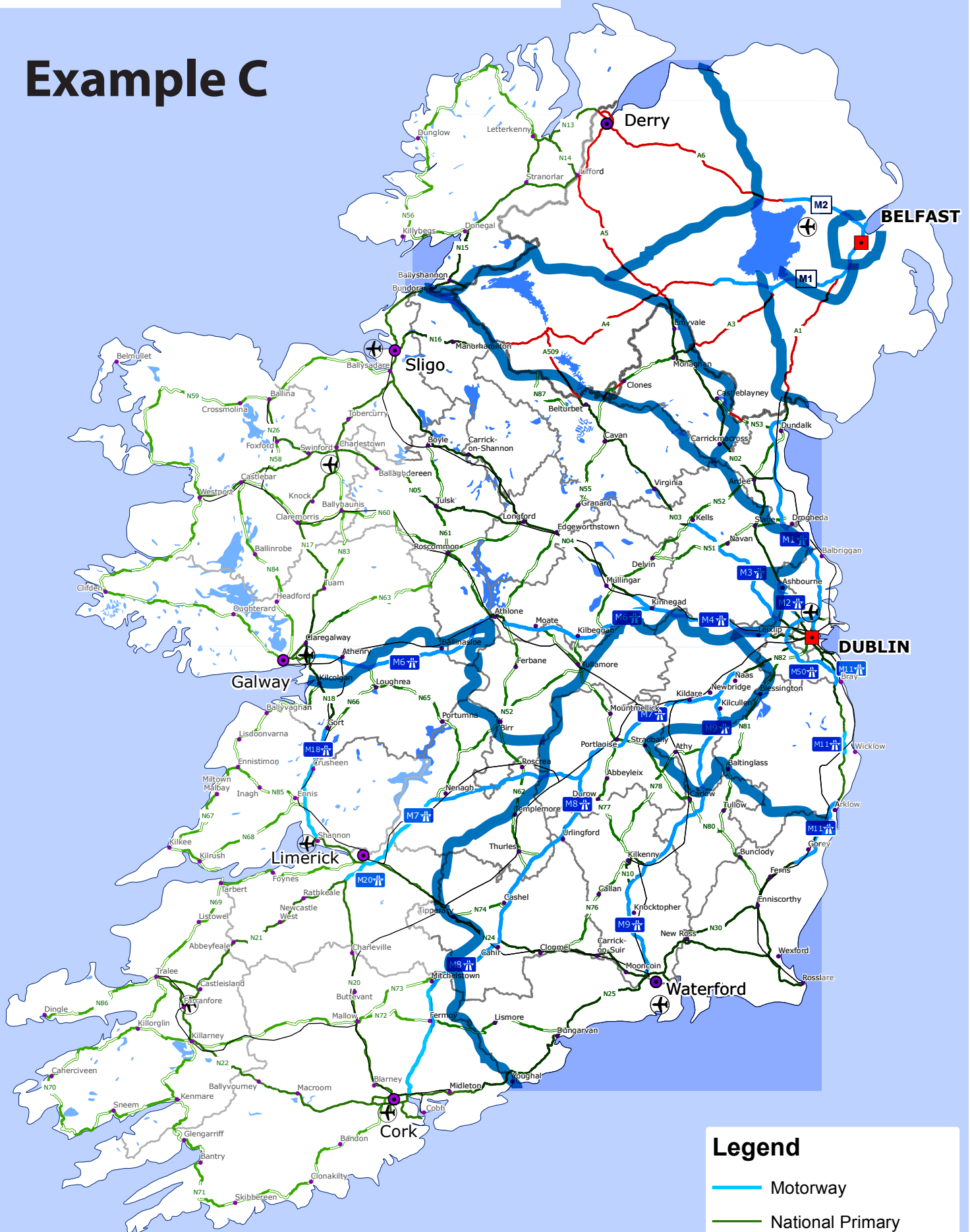
Example B

1. Example B envisages merging Meath, Kildare and Kilmore; Tuam, Killala and Achonry, Elphin, Ardagh, Limerick and Killaloe; Glendalough, Ferns, Ossory and Leighlin; Cork, Cloyne and Ross, Cashel, Waterford and Lismore, Ardfert and Aghadoe.
2. Example B does not meet all the guidelines. In regard to attendance in the enlarged diocese of Tuam, Killala, Achonry, Elphin, Ardagh, Limerick and Killaloe, the figure would fall well below the desired figure of 2,500 worshippers per diocese. In other respects it fulfils the statistical criteria. It would result in 10 dioceses, 5 in the Northern Province and 5 in the Southern Province.
3. The approach would however involve considerable restructuring of the current arrangements with the present dioceses of Cashel, Ferns and Ossory, Dublin and Glendalough and Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh all being altered considerably. There would probably be 'tweaking' required, in particular parishes in the North-Western part of Kilmore may seek to be incorporated into Clogher or Elphin. Similarly, the parts of Glendalough currently in West Dublin (Lucan, Leixlip, Straffan, Newcastle-Lyons etc) may seek to be incorporated into Dublin or Meath rather than be an 'Island' separate from the new diocese of Glendalough, Ferns and Ossory. Thus, while Example B does not of itself undermine the principle of attempting to keep within traditional ecclesiastical boundaries it does pose a risk to it.
4. Another risk with Example B is that as noted above the enlarged diocese of Tuam does not meet the intended figure for worshippers and barely meets the intended figure for the number of cures. As a diocese, it would comprise a very large geographical area with a very thinly spread Church of Ireland population. This might be seen as putting the less populous parishes together and thus risking the situation that a future commission may be required to re-examine the entire question in a few years' time.
5. Finally, the Commission is conscious of the view expressed by a considerable number of people in both Tuam, Killala and Achonry and Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh (and elsewhere) that dioceses should not be too large. In creating a large diocese in the West of Ireland on a 'North-South' axis, the restructuring of dioceses in the West of Ireland outlined in Example B is not totally satisfactory in this regard.

Diocese	COI Population	Attendance (2013)	Cures	Churches	Schools (ROI only)
Armagh	34,420	7,102	43	89	2
Down and Dromore	84,290	12,731	75	119	-
Connor	85,540	10,815	74	116	-
Derry and Raphoe	36,480	6,066	48	121	21
Clogher	17,780	3,951	32	72	5
Dublin	35,500	5,444	41	64	34
Meath, Kildare and Kilmore	15,960	3,128	31	113	26
TKA, Elphin, Ardagh, Limerick & Killaloe	18,520	2,189	30	121	24
Glendalough, Ferns, Ossory & Leighlin	25,220	3,879	41	157	35
Cork, Cloyne and Ross, Cashel, Waterford, Lismore, Ardfert & Aghadoe	22,670	2,972	34	118	29
Total	376,380	58,277	449	1090	176

Ireland Road Network

Example C



Legend

- Motorway
- National Primary
- National Secondary
- Northern Ireland Roads
- Railways

Example C

1. Example C envisages nine dioceses through the merging of the current diocese of Cashel, Ferns and Ossory with Kildare. Meath would be merged with Kilmore, Elphin & Ardagh and Tuam, Killala & Achonry. Finally it suggests merging the current dioceses of Cork, Cloyne and Ross and Limerick and Killaloe.
2. Example C fulfils all the numerical criteria adopted by the Commission. Indeed the attendance figure exceeds 3,000 per diocese, well in excess of the desired minimum.
3. With regard to the other criteria, it may be thought that Example C again fails to meet the view of many people, especially those living in the West of Ireland, that dioceses should not be too large. The suggested Diocese of Meath, Kilmore and Tuam would be very large, albeit with relatively good transport links based on an East-West axis.

Diocese	Population 2011	Attendance 2013	Cures	Churches	Schools (ROI only)
Armagh	34,420	7,102	43	89	2
Down and Dromore	84,290	12,731	75	119	-
Connor	85,540	10,815	74	116	-
Derry and Raphoe	36,480	6,066	48	121	21
Clogher	17,780	3,951	32	72	5
Dublin and Glendalough	46,930	7,252	56	105	48
Meath, Kilmore EA and Tuam KA	23,830	3,863	42	160	35
Cashel, Kildare, Leighlin Ferns and Ossory	22,810	3,095	40	174	33
Cork, Cloyne, Ross, Limerick and Killaloe	24,300	3,402	39	134	32
Total	376,380	58,277	449	1,090	176

4. The Commission also considered the possibility of a Diocese of Belfast in the context of this or other examples. If a Diocese of Belfast was included in this example, the figures for that Diocese and Down and Dromore and Connor would be adjusted to read as appears on the table below.
5. If the suggestion of a Diocese of Belfast were to be adopted in this example, the 10 dioceses created would still fulfil the criteria set by the Commission. The creation of a new diocese of Belfast would be a new endeavour and would involve departing from the principle of maintaining traditional ecclesiastical boundaries. When the Commission discussed the suggestion, a variety of views were expressed.

Belfast	47,030	5,018	39	47	-
Down and Dromore	67,280	9,940	58	100	-
Connor	55,520	8,588	52	88	-

Example D

1. Example D envisages 9 dioceses through merging Clogher and Kilmore, Meath and Kildare with Leighlin, Ossory and Ferns, Cork, Cloyne and Ross with Ardfert, Aghadoe, Waterford, Lismore and Cashel and merging Tuam, Killala and Achonry with Elphin and Ardagh, Killaloe and Limerick.
2. Example D does not fulfil all the requirements set by the Commission. In terms of population, all of the dioceses would meet the minimum of 15,000 Church of Ireland members but in terms of attendance in 2013, the newly enlarged diocese of Tuam, Killala and Achonry with Elphin and Ardagh and Killaloe and Limerick would still fall short of the minimum attendance of 2,500.
3. Like Example B above, the enlarged diocese of Tuam, Killala, Achonry, with Elphin, Ardagh and Killaloe does not meet the intended figure for worshippers and barely meets the intended figure for the number of cures. As a diocese, it would comprise a very large geographical area with a very thinly spread Church of Ireland population. Some people might see it as putting the less populous parishes together and thus risking the situation that a future commission may be required to re-examine the entire question in a few years' time.
4. Another disadvantage of Example D is that it involves considerable diocesan restructuring with the current dioceses of Cashel, Ferns and Ossory, Limerick and Killaloe, Clogher and Kilmore all undergoing extensive restructuring.
5. Finally, Example D would also orientate the enlarged diocese of Tuam and Limerick and Killaloe on a North-South axis and as noted above, the Commission is concerned that this does not lend itself to making use of better transport links.

Diocese	Population (2011)	Attendance (2013)	Cures	Churches	Schools (ROI only)
Armagh	34,420	7,102	43	89	2
Down and Dromore	84,290	12,731	75	119	-
Connor	85,540	10,815	74	116	-
Derry and Raphoe	36,480	6,066	48	121	21
Clogher and Kilmore	22,990	5,616	46	127	15
Dublin and Glendalough	46,930	7,252	56	105	48
Meath, Kildare, Leighlin, Ossory and Ferns	24,540	3,534	43	174	37
Cork, Ardfert and Aghadoe, Waterford, Lismore and Cashel	22,670	2,972	34	118	29
Tuam, Killala, Achonry, Elphin and Ardagh, Killaloe and Limerick	18,520	2,189	30	121	23
Total	376,380	58,277	449	1,090	175

