

2011



IRISH CATHOLIC
BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

Council for Research &
Development

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[DIOCESAN PRIEST AGE PROFILE]

A collection of age-based data from Irish Dioceses

Introduction

In October 2011, I sent each Diocesan Secretary a one-page personalised questionnaire asking three questions:

1. The number of parishes in that Diocese
2. The number of Diocesan priests currently assigned to parish ministry in that Diocese
3. The number of Diocesan priests (include **only** those currently assigned to ministry) in one of seven age groups. The ages were grouped to match those used by the Central Statistics Office.

This was to establish a quick snapshot of the age profile of the number of Diocesan priests currently in ministry (hereafter known as priests) across the 26 dioceses of Ireland. By late October 22 of the 26 Dioceses had returned their completed questionnaire by email or in the post. By mid-November, the remaining 4 Dioceses had returned their completed questionnaires. What follows is the data that arose from this questionnaire and a short comparison with a similar survey of Dioceses completed in autumn 2007.

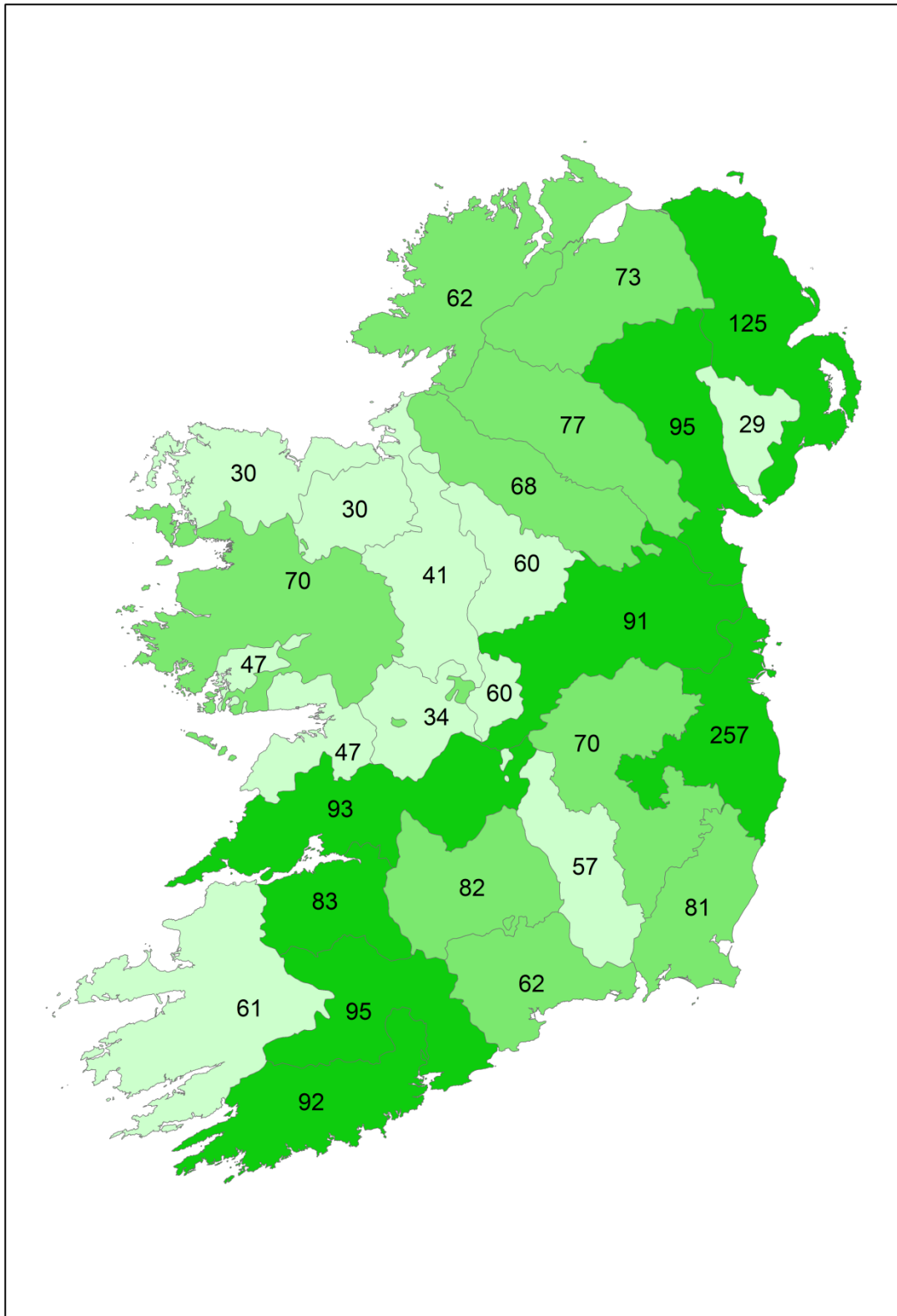
Numbers and proportions of priests in Irish Dioceses

From the data returned from each of the 26 Dioceses, there are 1,965 priests currently assigned to parish ministry. Of the Dioceses, Dublin has the most with 257 priests with Down & Connor having just under half of this number at 125 priests. The table below shows the distribution (numerically ranked from largest to smallest) of the 1,965 priests currently assigned to parish ministry.

Diocese	Numbers of priests 2011
Dublin	257
Down & Connor	125
Cloyne	95
Armagh	95
Killaloe	93
Cork & Ross	92
Meath	91
Limerick	83
Cashel & Emlly	82
Ferns	81
Clogher	77
Derry	73
Tuam	70
Kildare & Leighlin	70
Kilmore	68
Waterford & Lismore	62
Raphoe	62
Kerry	61
Ardagh & Clonmacnois	60
Ossory	57
Galway	47
Elphin	41
Clonfert	34
Killala	30
Achonry	30
Dromore	29

From this table, it is evident that the seven Dioceses with the smallest numbers (Ossory, Galway, Elphin, Clonfert, Killala, Achonry and Dromore) combined have just marginally more priests (268) than has Dublin. The proportions of total numbers give a more generalised picture of the number of priests in Ireland. The table below shows these ranked proportions. The map on the next page shows these data represented on a simple gradient of small numbers, medium numbers and large numbers.

Figure 1: numbers of priests serving in parish ministry 2011



Diocese	Number of priests	Proportion of total number (%)
Dublin	257	13.1
Down & Connor	125	6.4
Armagh	95	4.8
Cloyne	95	4.8
Cork & Ross	92	4.7
Killaloe	93	4.7
Meath	91	4.6
Cashel & Emlly	82	4.2
Limerick	83	4.2
Ferns	81	4.1
Clogher	77	3.9
Derry	73	3.7
Kildare & Leighlin	70	3.6
Tuam	70	3.6
Kilmore	68	3.5
Raphoe	62	3.2
Waterford & Lismore	62	3.2
Ardagh & Clonmacnois	60	3.1
Kerry	61	3.1
Ossory	57	2.9
Galway	47	2.4
Elphin	41	2.1
Clonfert	34	1.7
Achonry	30	1.5
Dromore	29	1.5
Killala	30	1.5
	1,965	100.0

Most of Ireland's Dioceses have between 3 and 4% of the total number of priests. However, those with the smallest proportions (i.e. below 3%) again those with the smallest numbers of priests. Dublin Diocese has just under 1 in 8 of Ireland's priests currently assigned to it.

Age groups and priests in Ireland

In the 2007 age profile report, it was noted that the age profile for Catholic priests in Ireland is generally older than for all age groups recorded by the Republic's Central Statistics Office.

That is to say, when you compare the proportions of the total number of men in each age group for the Republic with the same age group of priests in Ireland, the age profile of Catholic priests is older. The tables and graph below summarise the age group data for the priests of Ireland and these data in comparison to those men in the same age group.

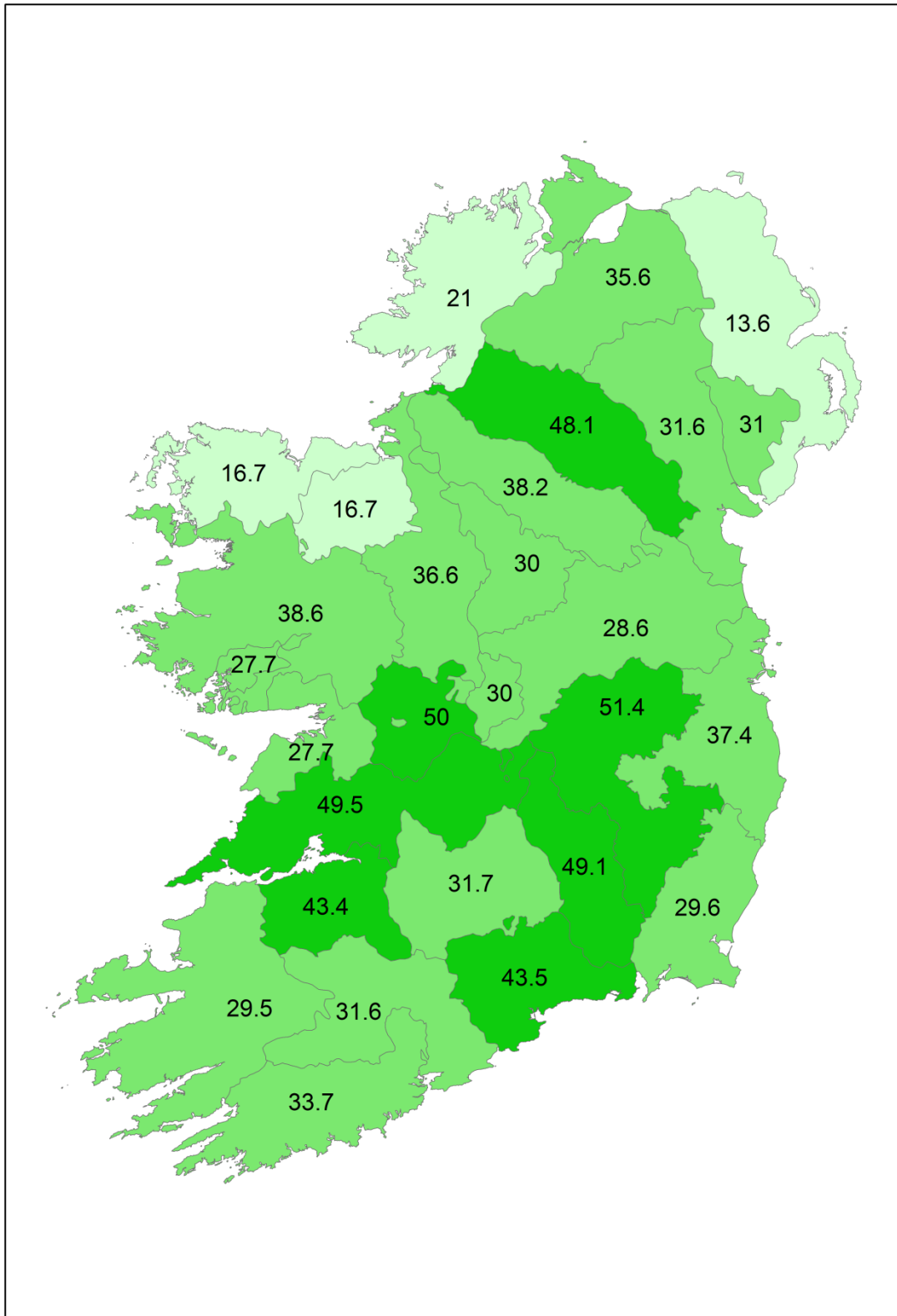
	All Dioceses	2011
25-34	32	1.6
35-44	249	12.7
45-54	457	23.3
55-64	528	26.9
65-74	491	25.0
75-84	181	9.2
85 years plus	27	1.4

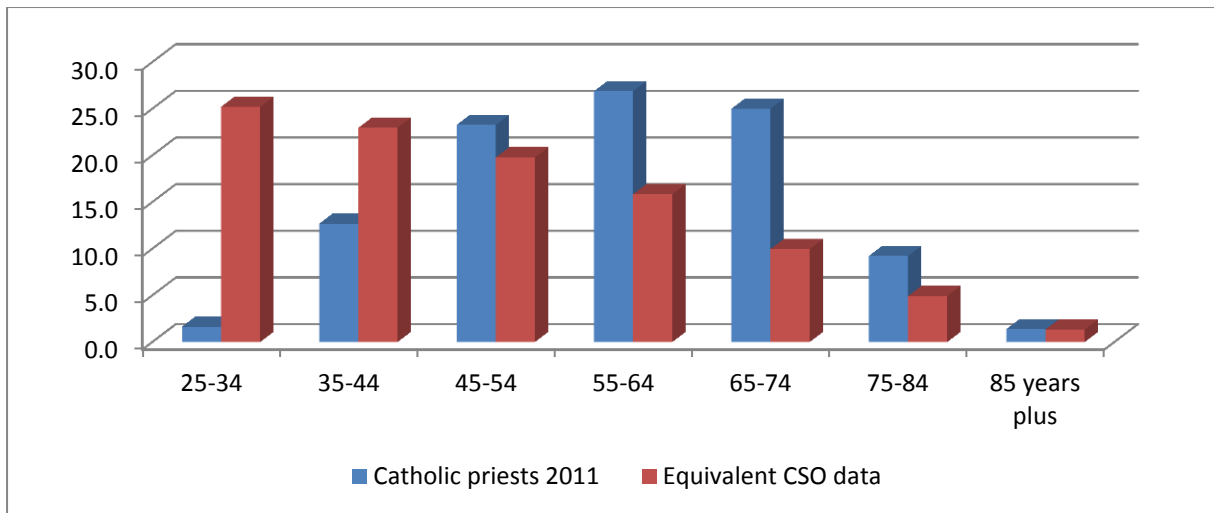
As can be seen, just over three quarters of all of the priests in Ireland are aged between 45 and 74. The largest proportion of priests in Ireland is in the 55 to 64 age group and, as can be seen from the table below, this proportion is increasing. The proportions of priests in the sub-44 age groups are decreasing. It should be noted however that the proportions in the 2007 survey are based on a slightly different definition of priests currently in ministry.

	2011	2007
25-34	1.6	3.6
35-44	12.7	15.1
45-54	23.3	20.7
55-64	26.9	23.8
65-74	25.0	24.8
75-84	9.2	9.5
85 years plus	1.4	2.5

It is evident as well that there is a smaller percentage of older priests currently in parish ministry than in 2007. The map overleaf shows the percentage of priests in each Diocese on a simple gradient of small numbers, medium numbers and large numbers. Of note is the cluster of Dioceses in the south of the island with relatively high percentages of priests aged 65 and over.

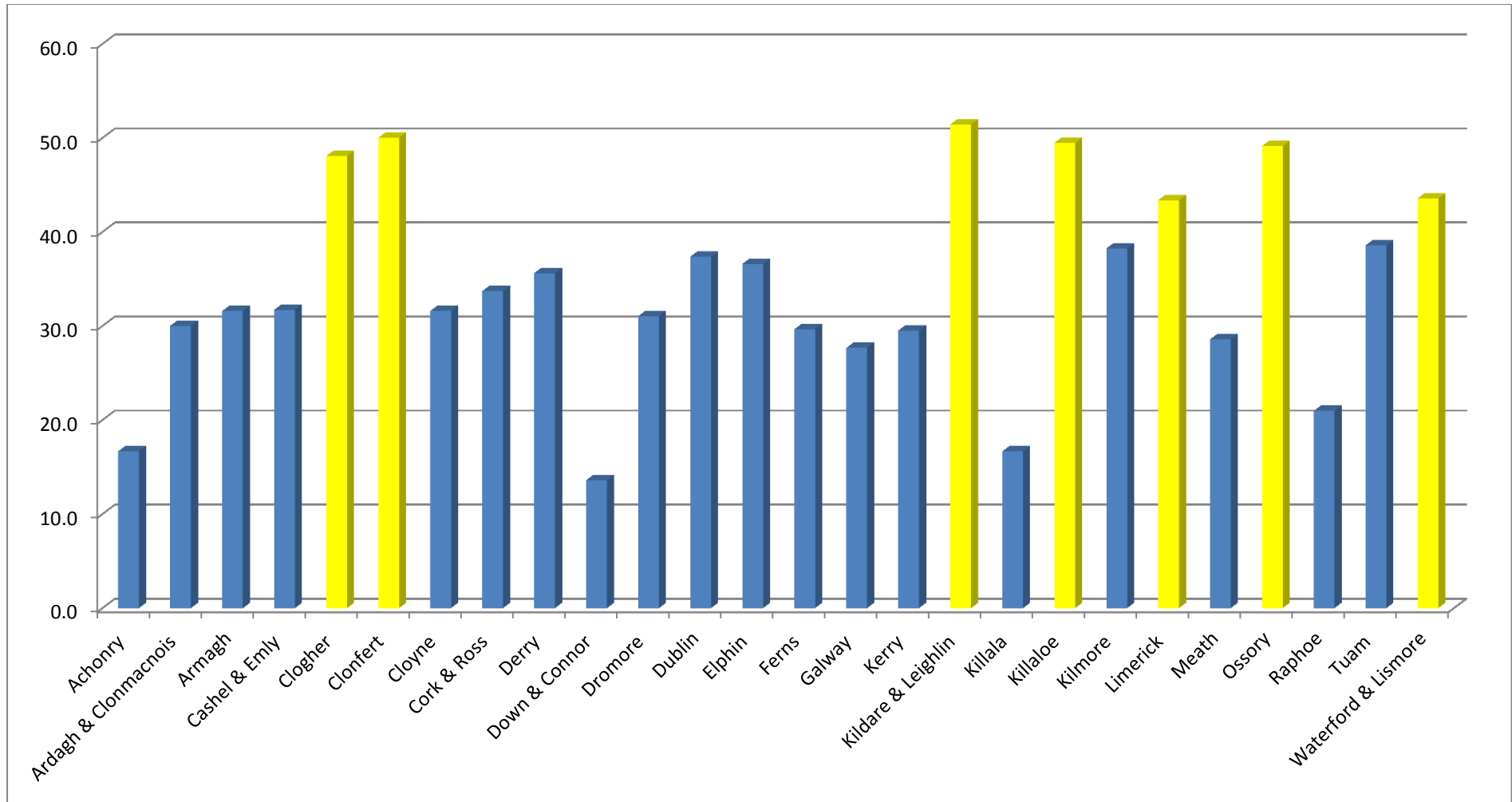
Figure 2: Percentage of priests in each Diocese aged 65 and over 2011





The graph above shows the proportions of priests in Ireland in each group in blue and the equivalent number of men in the Republic in the same age group for 2011 in red. As is evident, the age profile for the priests is older with far higher proportions in the older age groups than for the male population as a whole. It is only in the 24-44 age groups that there are smaller percentages of priests than men in the Republic more generally.

The graph below shows the 26 Dioceses of Ireland and the proportion of the priests in each Diocese aged 65 years and over. Dioceses marked in yellow are those with over 40% of their priests aged 65 and over.



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