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IRISH CATHOLIC
BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

Council for Research &
Development

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[DIOCESAN PRIEST AGE PROFILE]

A collection of new, age-based data from Catholic dioceses in Ireland

Introduction

This is the second age profile of the priests currently assigned to parish ministry in dioceses in Ireland. It updates the data presented by a similar report in 2011. In October 2013, I sent each Diocesan Secretary a 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.

This was to establish a profile of Diocesan priests currently in ministry (hereafter known as priests) across the 26 dioceses of Ireland. By mid-November, all 26 dioceses had returned their completed questionnaires. What follows are the data that arose from this questionnaire and a short comparison with a similar survey of dioceses completed in 2007 and the 2011 survey.

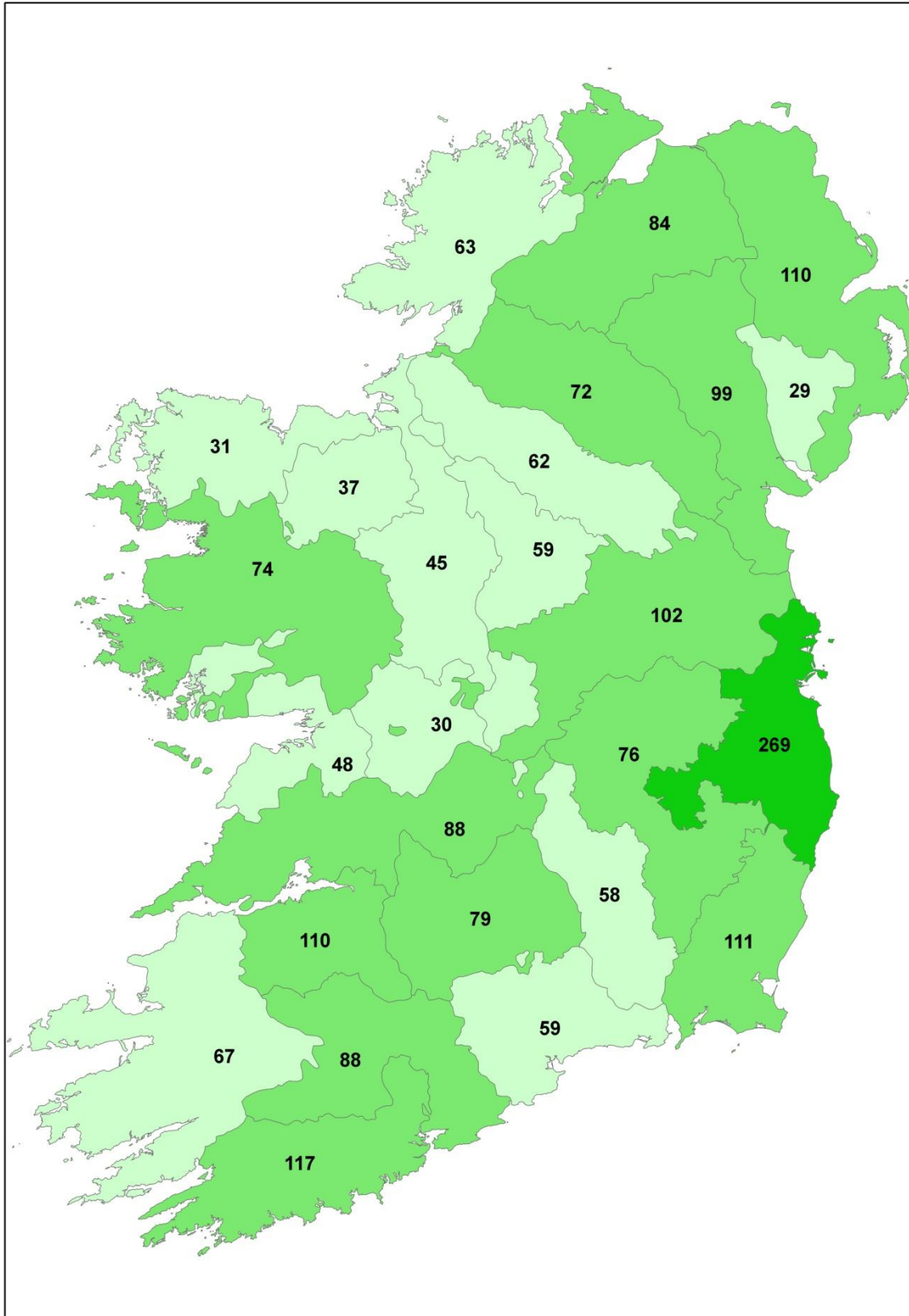
Numbers and proportions of priests in Irish dioceses

From the data returned from each of the 26 dioceses, there are 2,067 (an increase on the 1,965 reported in 2011) priests currently assigned to parish ministry. Of the dioceses, Dublin has the most with 269 priests with Cork & Ross having under half of this number at 117 priests. The table below shows the distribution (numerically ranked from largest to smallest) of the 2,067 priests currently assigned to parish ministry.

dioceses	Number	Proportion of total number
Dublin	269	13.0
Cork & Ross	117	5.7
Ferns	111	5.4
Down & Connor	110	5.3
Limerick	110	5.3
Meath	102	4.9
Armagh	99	4.8
Cloyne	88	4.3
Killaloe	88	4.3
Derry	84	4.1
Cashel & Emlly	79	3.8
Kildare & Leighlin	76	3.7
Tuam	74	3.6
Clogher	72	3.5
Kerry	67	3.2
Raphoe	63	3.0
Kilmore	62	3.0
Ardagh & Clonmacnois	59	2.9
Waterford & Lismore	59	2.9
Ossory	58	2.8
Galway	48	2.3
Elphin	45	2.2
Achonry	37	1.8
Killala	31	1.5
Clonfert	30	1.5
Dromore	29	1.4
	2,067	100

From this table, it is evident that the seven dioceses with the smallest numbers (Ossory, Galway, Elphin, Achonry, Killala, Clonfert, Dromore) combined have just marginally more priests (278) than has Dublin. The proportions of total numbers give a more generalised picture of the number of priests in Ireland. The table above also shows these ranked proportions. The map on the next page shows these data represented on a simple gradient of small, medium and large numbers of priests per diocese.

Figure 1: numbers of priests serving in parish ministry by diocese 2013



Most of Ireland's dioceses have between 2 and 4% of the total number of priests. However, those with the smallest proportions (i.e. below 3%) are those with the smallest numbers of priests. The

total number of priests assigned to parish ministry has increased since 2011 but the regional distribution has differed somewhat. In 2011, Cork and Ross had 92 priests assigned to ministry but this year they have 117. Limerick diocese has also seen an increase in the reported numbers over this short period. Ferns, Derry and Achonry likewise have seen increases in the reported numbers of priests.

Age groups and priests in Ireland

In a 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 below summarise the age group data for the priests of Ireland and these data in comparison to those men in the same age group.

	Numbers in all dioceses 2013	2011	2013
25-34	32	1.6	1.5
35-44	249	12.7	10.4
45-54	457	23.3	23.2
55-64	528	26.9	25.1
65-74	491	25.0	27.1
75-84	181	9.2	11.2
85 years plus	27	1.4	1.5

As can be seen, three quarters of all of the priests in Ireland are aged between 45 and 74. This is not a large change from 2011. However, the age profile is getting older with larger proportions of the priests now falling within the older age categories. The largest proportion of priests in Ireland is now in the 65 to 74 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”.

	2007	2011	2013
25-34	3.6	1.6	1.5
35-44	15.1	12.7	10.4
45-54	20.7	23.3	23.2
55-64	23.8	26.9	25.1
65-74	24.8	25.0	27.1
75-84	9.5	9.2	11.2
85 years plus	2.5	1.4	1.5

It is evident as well that there is a larger proportion of priests currently in parish ministry aged 65 and over than in 2007 and 2011. The map overleaf shows the percentage of priests in each diocese aged 65 and over on a simple gradient of small, medium and large numbers of priests per diocese. 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 2013

