



IRISH CATHOLIC
BISHOPS' CONFERENCE
COMHDHÁIL EASPAG CAITLÍCEACH ÉIREANN

***Report on the age profile of Diocesan priests currently
working in Ireland's Dioceses***

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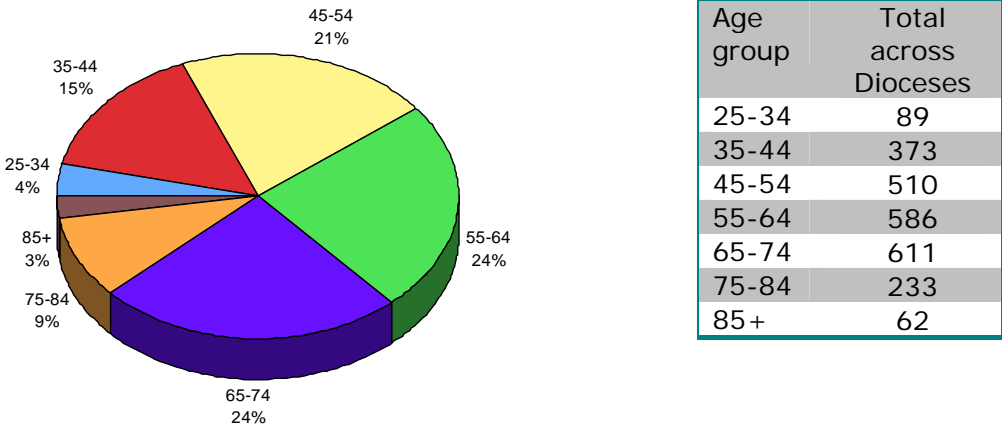
A Commission of the Irish Bishops' Conference

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In March 2007, the Dioceses of the Province of Cashel were asked to complete a simple one page questionnaire. The questionnaire asked for the number of priests currently working in that Dioceses and in which age group they fell. The motivation for this project was in response to requests from Most Rev Dermot Clifford and Most Rev William Lee for information on the ageing profile of the Dioceses.

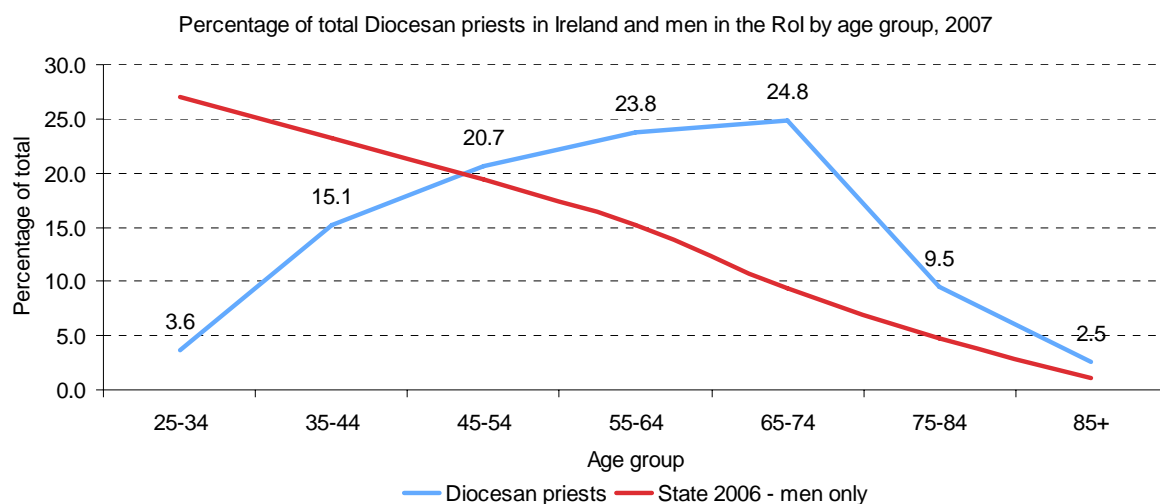
In June 2007, a further request was made to compile similar data for the remaining Dioceses of Ireland. This is result of this data collection and analysis exercise. It is intended that this project would inform a broader discussion about the ageing of Diocesan clergy in the Church in Ireland and the implications that this will have for ministry as well as for Diocesan planning and strategy in the coming years. What follows is a brief analysis of the compiled data from 25 of 26 of Ireland’s Dioceses and some attempt at forecasting to 2020.

Data on 2,464 priests was compiled in August and September of 2007. The table and chart below shows the data as collected. Note that the age groups chosen reflect the age groups used by the Irish Central Statistics Office for comparability.



45% of the priests in the survey are aged between 45 and 64 years with almost one quarter aged 65 to 74, therefore approaching formal retirement. While some variation exists within Dioceses, the proportion of priests under 44 years of age stands at 19%. Comparing this to the population of men within the same age groups in the Republic of Ireland, we can note two key features:

1. the age profile of the Diocesan priests of Ireland is disproportionately older than the male population as a whole, and
2. the age group 45 to 54 is the only age group where the proportion of males in the Republic matches that of the Diocesan priesthood.



Turning to the averages across the Dioceses and age groups, we can see that a Diocese has an average of four priests aged 34 or under and an average of 47 aged between 55 and 74. Almost half (48.6%) of Diocesan priests are aged 55 to 74 years compared to just under one quarter of those in the male population as a whole.

A forecast based on the data collected this year and previous surveys indicates a downward trend in the percentage change in the net balance of Diocesan priests to 2020. Net balance refers to the figure derived the following formula:

$$\text{Net balance} = (\text{departures} + \text{deaths}) - \text{ordinations}$$

This would indicate that between now and 2020, and taking a figure of 2,464 priests for 2007, we would expect a total of 2,188 priests in 2010, 1,891 in 2015 and 1,574 in 2020. As we might expect, there would be some variation across Dioceses. The model utilised below assumes a rate of change in total personnel in the Dioceses similar to that seen in the period 1996 to 2005 outward to 2020. In truth we do not know the exact figure for ordinations, deaths and departures across this time. In 2015, there is forecasted to be 23% fewer Diocesan priests in Ireland than in 2007.

Net balance in numbers of Diocesan priests	
1996	-21
1997	-36
1998	-67
1999	-44
2000	-78
2001	-52
2002	-64
2003	-52
2004	-43
2005	-35
2010	-57
2015	-61
2020	-65