



goodwill and support

require planning permission. By the way there is a very good website - longford-parish.com, showing excellent coverage of the gutted interior which readers can consult. So with the decks of debris cleared where does the operation go from here and how long will it take?

'We have prepared a 20-page 'vision statement' outlining broadly what we want for the refurbished building and this has been handed over to the architects who have worked on about 170 churches in the past. But all that planning work is time-consuming especially for a very complicated and extensive project as this one. I will be pleasantly surprised if the builders are on site in 18 months time and the broad plan is to have 2015 as the year of completing the job but there are many caveats attached to that projection. Of course it may be possible to carry out some of the preparatory work in the short term and it would be a great bonus if local contractors were successful in tendering for any of the works'.

Inevitably the question of money attracts a lot of attention with regard to such a huge project as this. Fr. Healy explains that it is hoped that the Insurance cover will be adequate to restore the building. However he explained that there is now an opportunity to adapt the Cathedral for the future. Already a number of ideas have emerged such as a museum, a hospitality room, library or bookshop, as well as good toilet facilities etc. Such new works are considered to be enhancement and will be a cost that will have to be borne by the parish community.

So far and without any recourse to fund-raising, over €300,000 has been given to the fund for such work and the church authorities are extremely grateful for this generosity so early in the project. The only official fundraiser announced to date is an envelope collection throughout the diocese each year on the Sunday nearest the feast of St. Mel. It is hoped that following the architect's work a reasonable esti-

mate of overall costs, insurance money, etc. will be available within the next 12 months. Fr. Healy is anxious to emphasise the totality of the diocese of Ardagh & Clonmacnois. 'Of course the Cathedral is synonymous with the town of Longford and county Longford in particular but it is also the Head Church of the entire diocese even though some of the parishes are up to 60 miles away from St. Mel's. I would hope that the re-dedication of the refurbished Cathedral will be an opportunity for us to strengthen the ties with the diocesan Cathedral and all the parishes and of course we have had many diocesan-wide events over the years with great success,' he said.

In the meantime the steady extra workload involved in the ongoing development adds greatly to the limited resources at Longford Presbytery and Fr. Healy greatly appreciates the commitment of his fellow priests and the dedication of the lay staff there who have consistently gone beyond the call of duty to keep everything running smoothly despite the additional pressures attached to the ongoing Cathedral project on their doorstep.

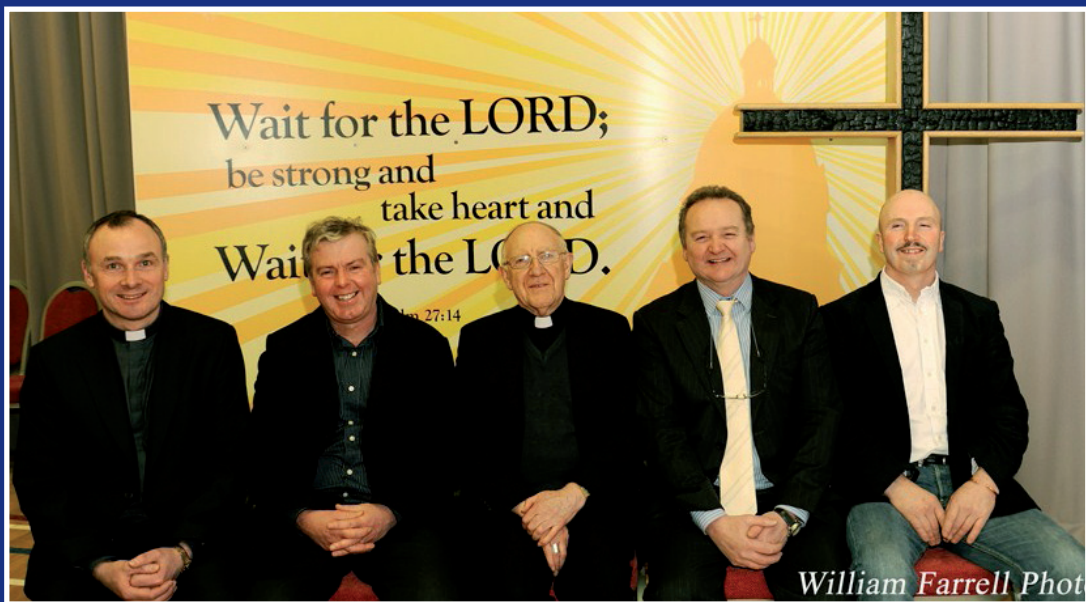
Fr. Tom is very grateful for all of the goodwill and support that has been evident in the parish community since last Christmas's traumatic events. He is looking forward to being involved in the challenge of restoring St. Mel's Cathedral and is confident of a great reopening in the not too distant future.



Fr. Tom Healy and Gavin Duignan, Irish Contract Seating pictured at St. Mel's Cathedral Centre surveying plans of the new Sanctuary area.



One of the early Masses at St. Mel's Cathedral Centre.



William Farrell Phot

Pictured at the First Mass at St. Mel's Cathedral Centre are Fr. Tom Healy, Adm.; Noel Strange, Bishop Colm O'Reilly, Damian Cunningham and Frank McKiernan.

Acknowledgments

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