



“Is not this what God asks of you?”

(MICAH 6:8)

Working Document for the
Irish National Synodal Assembly

17th October 2026

Gormanston
Co. Meath



**Irish
Synodal
Pathway**

Contents

Section 1: Synodal Reception – What was heard?	3
Section 2: An Emerging Vision of Church: A theological reflection from the Irish Synodal Pathway	6
Section 3: Five Pathways for the Renewal of the Catholic Church in Ireland	8
Section 4: Reading the Signs of the Times: Why does this matter in Ireland today?	16
Section 5: Proposals for Pathways for the Catholic Church in Ireland: The Work of the Irish National Synodal Assembly 2026	24
Pathway 1: The Church that Proclaims the Gospel	25
Pathway 2: The Church as a Community of Belonging	35
Pathway 3: The Church as a Place of Healing	43
Pathway 4: The Church that Accompanies	50
Pathway 5: The Church that Empowers for Ministry and Co-Responsibility	59
Section 6: Appendix – Links to Full Submissions from Working Groups	71

Section 1

Synodal Reception – *What was heard?*

When the Bishops of Ireland announced in 2021 that the Church in Ireland would embark on a synodal pathway, the fundamental question that was offered for the process of discernment was: “What does God want from the Church in Ireland at this time?”

For the many people who participated in Conversations in the Spirit across the country, the question prompted discussions around pastoral practice, liturgy, our sense of mission, our place in society, our relationship with the world, our history, how we relate internally and externally, our structures, our failures, our struggles, our fears, our hopes, etc. Very quickly, the Synodal Pathway led to fundamental questions about our identity and our mission. What is the Church in Ireland in the 21st century? Who are the members of the Church? And what is our mission?

Over the course of the Synodal Pathway an attempt was made to not simply gather opinions but to discern the promptings of the Holy Spirit through prayer, listening and Conversation in the Spirit. As dioceses, parishes, religious congregations, ecclesial movements and other groups listened to one another, certain convergences began to emerge. These recurring insights, heard across different contexts and confirmed at successive stages of the process, instilled confidence that we were in the process of discerning together what God was asking of us at this time. What follows describes not simply the stages of a process, but what was being heard over five years of prayer, listening and discernment as the People of God in Ireland.

Initially, while the Irish Synodal Pathway remained embedded in the universal synodal process, a number of **THEMES** emerged as key areas in the life of the Church in Ireland where renewal was considered necessary. These were published in the *National Synthesis* in 2022¹ which was the contribution of the Church in Ireland to the Universal Synod on Synodality 2021-2024. Following the closure of the Synod on Synodality in October 2024, the Church in Ireland returned to these themes to discern again the question “What does God want of the Church in Ireland at this time?”

During the successive stages of listening and discernment, one insight increasingly brought coherence to the many voices that had been heard. Rather than becoming simply another theme among many, Baptism emerged as the key through which we could understand our identity and our mission.

1 Synthesis of the Consultation in Ireland for the Diocesan Stage of the Universal Synod 2021 - 2023

It became the fundamental lens through which the question first posed in 2021 could be discerned more deeply; to unlocking our understanding of who we are and what God is calling us to be.

The discernment did not end with the recognition of Baptism as our foundational identity. Rather, it enabled further recognition of those areas in which the Holy Spirit was calling the Catholic Church in Ireland most urgently to conversion, renewal and action. From this discernment emerged the seven priorities presented in *Baptised and Sent*². They were not intended to summarise everything that had been heard, but to identify the principal areas in which the convergences of the synodal process invited us to respond.

By Baptism we belong, we are equal, we share responsibility, we are empowered to minister, we are called to holiness, we find healing and redemption, and we are sent on mission. In discerning how a focus on Baptism would allow the Church in Ireland to respond to what God is asking of us, seven **PRIORITIES** were discerned and published in *Baptised and Sent* (2025):

1. Belonging
2. Co-responsibility and Lay Ministry
3. Family
4. Formation and Catechesis
5. Healing
6. Women
7. Youth

Following the discernment of these priorities at the Pre-Synodal Assembly in Kilkenny in October 2025, seven Working Groups were established to receive each priority through prayer, study and Conversation in the Spirit, and to deepen that discernment by articulating practical proposals that might help the National Synodal Assembly consider how these priorities could be embodied in the life of the Church. Their task was not to begin a new discernment, but to build upon the discernment already undertaken across the Church in Ireland.

The proposals received from the Working Groups reflect the experience and wisdom of their members, and echo the many initiatives and outreaches that are already taking place at all levels in the life of the Church in Ireland – at national level under the initiative of the Irish Episcopal Conference, at diocesan level, and at other levels under the care of religious congregations, movements and associations of the faithful. But the proposals are above all the fruit of the prayerful discernment that has characterised the Irish Synodal Pathway since its inception. Read together, the recommendations of the Working Groups do more than propose practical actions. They bear witness to the vision of the Church that has emerged through five years of prayer, listening and discernment. It is to that emerging vision that we now turn.

2 *Baptised and Sent: Preparatory Document for the Pre-Synodal Assembly Being Held in Kilkenny on 18th October 2025*



The Synodal Pathway



1. Diocesan Stage of the Universal Synod (2021-2022)

Listening across dioceses and other communities to what the People of God were saying about their experience of Church and what the Holy Spirit might be asking of us



2. Pre-Synodal Assembly, Athlone (2022)

Receiving together what had been heard and affirming the fifteen themes emerging from the national consultation



3. National Synthesis (2022)

Gathering and discerning what had been heard across the Church in Ireland



4. Universal Synod on Synodality

Bringing the discernment of the local Churches into conversation with the universal Church



5. Towards October 2024

Receiving and deepening the discernment in preparation for the Second Session of the Synod



6. Final Document of the Universal Synod (2024)

Receiving the fruits of the discernment of the universal Church



7. Irish Reception and Further Discernment

Returning to what had been heard in Ireland in light of the universal synodal journey



8. Baptised and Sent (2025)

Recognising Baptism as foundational to our identity, dignity, vocation and mission



9. Seven Priorities

Belonging • Co-responsibility and Lay Ministry • Family • Formation and Catechesis • Healing • Women • Youth



10. Pre-Synodal Assembly, Kilkenny (2025)

Prayerfully receiving and discerning the priorities together



11. Seven Working Groups

Receiving, deepening and developing the discernment into practical proposals



12. Working Document for the National Synodal Assembly

Gathering and synthesising the fruits of the discernment for further local reflection and discernment



13. Local Discernment by Delegates and Communities

Prayerfully considering the proposals in local settings before the Assembly



14. National Synodal Assembly (2026)

Discerning and deliberating together and making recommendations



15. Bishops' Discernment

Receiving and discerning the recommendations of the National Synodal Assembly



16. Reception and Implementation

Embedding what has been received into the life and mission of the Church in Ireland



17. Evaluation

Listening again, reviewing what has borne fruit, and identifying what needs to develop or change



18. Ongoing Synodal Discernment

Continuing the cycle of listening, discernment, reception, conversion and mission

Section 2

An Emerging Vision of Church: A theological reflection from the Irish Synodal Pathway

The recommendations of the Working Groups, when viewed together, offer in the first instance an action plan for the Church in Ireland. However, and more significantly, they also offer a vision. The National Synodal Team now proposes five PATHWAYS towards the realisation of this vision.

This vision has not emerged from theological reflection alone, nor from the work of the Working Groups in isolation. Rather, it has taken shape through the prayer, listening and discernment of the People of God over the course of the Irish Synodal Pathway. As we have received the fruits of this discernment, our understanding of the Church has itself been deepened. We have come to recognise more clearly that the Church is a communion rooted in Baptism, where every person possesses an equal dignity, every gift is given for the building up of the Body of Christ, and every baptised person is called to participate in Christ's mission according to their vocation. In receiving the fruits of this discernment, we have also come to appreciate more deeply that Baptism provides the fundamental lens through which we understand who we are and what God is calling us to become. Gathered by the Father, united to Christ, nourished by the Word and Eucharist, and enlivened by the Holy Spirit, the Church in Ireland is called to become more fully a missionary communion, that is the pilgrim People of God in this place, discerning together and sent to proclaim and embody the Gospel.

In seeking to discern the voice of God over the course of this synodal process, a renewed reception, within the Irish context, of the Church's identity and mission as revealed in Christ and taught by the Second Vatican Council has emerged. This ecclesiology carries many of the elements which are already familiar from the ecclesiology that emerged during the Second Vatican Council, often called "The Church as the People of God" and which has a deep resonance in the ancient Irish expression *Pobal Dé*. In addition, it bears the imprint of the ecclesiology that has emerged through the Synod on Synodality, particularly its emphasis on synodality, discernment, and co-responsibility.

The synodal discernment has also reminded us that the Church is continually called to conversion. We have heard the longing for a Church that is a place of welcome and belonging, that accompanies families and young people, that recognises the gifts and vocation of women, that forms all the baptised for mission, that seeks healing through truth, justice and reconciliation, and that proclaims the Gospel with renewed confidence and hope. In this way, our understanding of communion has itself been deepened: communion is sustained not simply by unity, but through listening, truth, justice, reconciliation and the flourishing of the gifts and charisms entrusted to all God's people. These are not separate visions of the Church. Together they reveal complementary dimensions of the one mystery of the Church as the People of God journeying together in faith, hope and love.

The National Synodal Assembly will therefore be asked to consider the proposals contained in this working document in light of the vision of Church that has emerged through this shared journey of prayer, listening and discernment.

The key characteristics of this vision of Church now emerge as five pathways for the conversion, renewal and future growth of the Church in Ireland. We entrust this continuing journey to Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, “model of the interior acceptance of divine gifts and expert in prayerful listening”³.



3 Pope Leo XIV, <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/messages/vocations/documents/20260316-messaggio-vocazioni.html>

Section 3

Five Pathways for the Renewal of the Catholic Church in Ireland

1. The Church that Proclaims the Gospel

The Church exists to announce the Gospel of Jesus Christ, for mission belongs to its very nature. The Church is a mission.

The Irish Synodal Pathway has revealed a longing for a Church that has rediscovered its outward reaching energy and confidence in sharing the Gospel. While the memory of Ireland's rich missionary tradition remains a source of joy for the Church in Ireland, the years of declining practice and the painful legacy of abuse, have drained the Church of its outward-looking energy as we inevitably looked inwardly to address our core problems. It is only honest to admit that the Synodal Pathway itself struggled to escape from this solely inward-looking tendency as the Church in Ireland continues to question its past and to reflect on its current place in Irish society.

And yet there emerged from the discernment process a quiet, humble, almost hesitant longing that dared to hope of a Church that could confidently offer the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. The hesitation in this longing arises out of fear: there is of course the fear of a society or culture that might be hostile to the Gospel and that will all too quickly accuse us of hypocrisy, but there is also the fear that we no longer have the resources to confidently stand in the public sphere, and indeed the fear that we will in some way revert to a model of Church that seeks to impose rather than accompany.

“

“We envisage a Church that is missionary in its outlook. One where its members are confident in proclaiming the Gospel and committed, by virtue of their Baptism, to extend an invitation to others to engage in a living relationship with Jesus Christ.”

– From the Working Group on Formation and Catechesis

“

“The vision is of a missionary, synodal and relational Church that forms and empowers young people as co-responsible evangelisers.”

– From the Working Group on Youth



As always, the paradigm for this pathway of renewal is Christ who sees the crowd, has compassion for them, and sets about teaching them (Mark 6:34). The Church in Ireland cannot fail to look outwardly with compassion on the “crowd” which struggles to find meaning and hope in a world that has promised salvation through politics, economics, secularism, technology, and individualism, but has failed to deliver, with enormous costs in human terms. It is in this world that we are called to walk alongside our brothers and sisters with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, calling them to a saving encounter with Him who is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

It is this kind of Church that longs to enter the spaces of human suffering, fear, and despair. No space is alien to the hope and salvation offered by the Gospel. It is this kind of Church that seeks to walk alongside other Christians in a spirit of fraternity and united witness to the love that saves. The Church that emerged in Ireland following Catholic Emancipation in 1829 transformed the architectural landscape of our towns with its buildings (churches, schools, and hospitals) which symbolised the Church’s engagement with the world. Now we dare to hope of a Church capable of transforming the spiritual landscape of our culture through authentic witness, service, and joyful proclamation of the Gospel.



“Being in dialogue, walking together, is a visible expression of belonging to Christ and his Church.”

– From the Working Group on Belonging

2. The Church as a Community of Belonging

The Church seeks to be a community for all to whom she has given birth in the waters of Baptism. At our Baptism, we were each welcomed “with great joy” into the Christian community, and we were each marked with the sign of the Cross as a sign that we “belong” to Christ. In this home, we are nourished at the table of the Eucharist; we are encouraged to grow in faith, hope, and love; we learn that being Christian is not just the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but an existential personal encounter with an event and the living person of the Risen Christ; and we learn to accompany one another on our pilgrim journey in this world towards our heavenly home.

However, because of our brokenness and sinfulness, the community which is the Church is marked by conflict and pain. Many have experienced suffering and trauma in this community; others experience a feeling of not belonging or of not being made welcome. Even among those who feel that they belong, there is conflict and polarisation around liturgy, decision-making, equality, and even beliefs.

“

“The foundational truth of our faith is that we belong, first and foremost, to God. Because we belong to God, we are inherently bound to the rest of his creation – we belong to the Earth we call home and we belong to each other as members of one human family.”

– From the Working Group on Belonging

“

“No one is a stranger in the family of God.”

– From the Working Group on Belonging

If the Church in Ireland is to be a place where people experience belonging, a conversion of hearts and minds is required so that our common Baptism is honoured and respected, and so that our Church can become the home for all those who seek to respond to the invitation of Christ to make their home in Him as He has made his home in us (John 15:4). It is in such a home that a sense of belonging – which risks being subjective and merely on the level of feeling – can grow into the communion of the Body of Christ. Such a conversion must be signalled by a shift away from the invitation to “come home” towards a reaching out of the hand to others with the invitation, “let’s grow to be like Christ together ... let’s respond to the call to holiness together”. Let us keep before our minds the older brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son, who had loyally and faithfully stayed at home, but who could not bring himself to be part of his father’s joy in welcoming his brother home (Luke 15).

“

“The foundational building block of the parish community is the family and the parish itself is a family of families.”

– From the Working Group on Family

3. The Church as a Place of Healing

The need for healing and reconciliation within the Church has been recognised at every stage of the Irish Synodal Pathway in response to the hurt and trauma that is carried by so many of the baptised because of the crimes and abuses that are now an undeniable part of our story. The Synodal Pathway has offered us a way of ensuring that our efforts to address the crimes of the past do not, however unintentionally, lead to them being relegated to the past, but that the repulsive memory of such atrocities, and the pain carried by victims, become part of our identity and inform how we act both within the Church and as the Church in the world. The advances in safeguarding within the Church in Ireland are recognised as positive, but the courageous truth-telling of victims and survivors calls us beyond seeing healing as something the Church does *for* those who have been wounded. Their prophetic witness has enriched and strengthened our synodal journey and continues to shape our understanding of the Church we are called to become: a listening, truthful, healing and servant community, in which healing is pursued by walking together and working *with* one another.

The Church that seeks to be a place of healing looks to Christ as he stands before the tomb of Lazarus (John 11). He does not hide or disguise his grief, and despite the protestations of Martha warning him about the repulsive consequences of what he is about to face, he reaches with his Word into the place of human repulsion and offers new life, instructing others to unbind and liberate Lazarus. The Church that seeks to be a place of healing must be at the service of Christ who heals, offers new life, and liberates from the bonds that continue to imprison and burden those who have been hurt.

In the Church that seeks to be a place of healing, our common Baptism reminds us that, in Christ, we are entrusted to each other. When we recognise one another as brothers and sisters, and walk with and listen to one another, including those whose courageous truth-telling confronts us with the harm caused within the Church, we foster authentic relationships and shared responsibility in the Body of Christ. It then becomes a sacred duty to seek forgiveness, to work for healing, and to rebuild trust. To walk this path as brothers and sisters is not merely a spiritual exercise – it is an act of justice (*Final Document §46*).

“

“The truth-telling that has brought hope for healing of relationships and structures within the Church and renewal of its mission at the service of a wounded world through the synodal process owes a great deal to the courage of those who have shared their experiences of trauma, suffering and exclusion in the Church.”

– From the Working Group
on Healing

“

“Victims and survivors must be partners and included across Church structures and decision-making.”

– From the Working Group on Healing

4. The Church that Accompanies

Over the course of the Irish Synodal Pathway, a clear longing emerged for a Church that accompanies people along the path of life and faith. This is not to diminish the many ways in which the Church already accompanies people: parish communities and their pastors accompany people with authentic love and pastoral care on the paths of illness, old age, and bereavement; faith-filled teachers and chaplains accompany many young people in their formative years; chaplains and volunteers in the healthcare sector accompany the sick and their families; faith associations and movements create spaces for people to accompany one another; Church agencies and organisations accompany the poor, migrants, minorities, victims, prisoners, disadvantaged communities, people with additional needs, and many others who are at risk or in crisis.

What is perhaps now emerging as different is a longing for a Church that can accompany people in their search for God. Christian families can feel isolated and abandoned, with parents of young children struggling to find ways to live a life of prayer in the home and to help their children to grow in faith. A Church that seeks to accompany such families must be much more than a dispenser of resources but must offer ways of supporting them as they respond to the call to be a domestic church. For many years, the Church in Ireland has sought to accompany couples preparing for marriage, and couples experiencing difficulties in their marriage. Perhaps what is emerging now, however, is a longing for a Church that can accompany couples in their desire to live the vocation of sacramental marriage so that they grow in faith and unity together. Traditionally, the Church in Ireland has accompanied children and teenagers primarily through catechesis and preparation for the sacraments, and this relationship has been fractured due to the crimes of abuse committed against children and teenagers in the Church. But now, there is a clear need for a Church, conscious of its past crimes, and not forgetting its duty to catechise, to accompany young boys and girls towards a transforming encounter with Christ in prayer, in his Word, and in his sacraments. Many young adults are coming to a realisation that the promises they were made concerning meaning and happiness are empty, and are now discovering – often through social media – that a personal relationship with Christ experienced in community can offer the meaning and happiness they seek. This is surely a sign that God is calling the Church in Ireland to a new way of being with young adults so that they are guided in their discernment of what God is asking of them. The story of the apostle Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian official offers a powerful model for this attentive and faith-filled accompaniment (Acts 8:26-39).

“

“We envision families in vibrant parish communities of faith being nourished, welcomed, and enabled to live their baptismal promises co-responsibly... Our vision invites families... to engage confidently with a coherent, resource-rich and adaptable plan that honours existing good work... and enables the laity to live out their baptismal promises in shared mission.”

– From the Working Group
on Family



“

“Young people consistently expressed a desire not simply to be served, but to be recognised as co-responsible participants in the Church’s mission.”

– From the Working Group on Youth

This desire for accompaniment extends to people in every state of life, including single men and women, widows and widowers, separated and divorced persons, those returning to the faith, and those discovering it for the first time. The model for such accompaniment is the Risen Christ on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). He draws near, listens attentively to the disciples, walks alongside them in their confusion and disappointment, enlightens them through the scriptures, reveals himself in the breaking of the bread, and sends them forth renewed in hope. In the same way, the Church is called to be present to people in the realities of their lives, listening with compassion, sharing the light of the Gospel, and helping them to encounter Christ. Such accompaniment is not merely a pastoral strategy but a way of being Church, one that reflects the patient, attentive, and transformative presence of the Lord among his people.

“

“The Church must walk alongside people at every stage of life, providing opportunities for encounter, learning, reflection, belonging and mission.”

– From the Working Group on Formation and Catechesis

5. The Church that Empowers for Ministry and Co-responsibility

The Church has always held that Baptism bestows both dignity and responsibility. Each baptised person is a child of God and is called to share in the life and mission of the Church. While this responsibility is expressed through different vocations, ministries, and forms of service, the fundamental call to participation belongs to all the baptised. Yet historical developments have often created the perception that responsibility for the Church's life and mission rests primarily with the ordained. In many places, decision-making and leadership continue to be exercised largely by clergy alone.

The Irish Synodal Pathway has discerned a longing for a Church in which all the baptised are empowered to exercise co-responsibility for the life and mission of the Church according to their gifts, charism, and vocation. This is not to remove or undermine those responsibilities that are proper to the ordained, but rather to give access to those responsibilities that can be proper to all the baptised. This too requires a conversion of minds and hearts, as well as a conversion of institutions and structures. The *Final Document* of the Synod on Synodality has already called for those participatory bodies currently envisaged in Church law to be mandated at diocesan and parish level (*Final Document* §104) so that those members of the People of God who are called to co-responsibility can exercise that service in the Church. Many and varied forms of lay ministry, both instituted and non-instituted, already make it possible for lay men and women to put their charisms at the service of the life and mission of the Church. A Church that seeks to empower lay men and women for co-responsibility must respond with courage and creativity to open up to all the baptised as many of the forms of ministry as are needed for the mission so that lay men and women can exercise their responsibility “to permeate and transform earthly realities with the spirit of the Gospel” (*Final Document* §66).

To empower does not only mean to encourage or give permission; in the context of ministry and co-responsibility it also implies formation. Lay men and women who discern a call to ministry need formation so that they undertake their service with the necessary theological, biblical, and spiritual foundations. Formation is also required for seminarians and clergy so that they too are empowered to minister in a co-responsible way with one another and with their lay brothers and sisters.

“

“Women already give significant leadership across the Church in Ireland... The deeper question is whether the Church’s structures, culture, language and practice properly receive women’s gifts as part of the Church’s mission”

– From the Working Group on Women

“

“Mature interdependence between ordained and lay ministries enables the whole Church to flourish.”

– From the Working Group on Co-responsibility and Lay Ministry

Within this vision, the participation of women is recognised as an essential dimension of the Church's life and mission. By virtue of Baptism, women share equally in the dignity and responsibility of discipleship, and their gifts and charisms are gifts to the entire Body of Christ. A Church committed to co-responsibility therefore seeks a genuine reciprocity between women and men, expressed in ministry, leadership, consultation, and decision-making, so that the Church more clearly reflects the communion, participation, and shared mission to which all the baptised are called.

A Single Ecclesial Vision

This renewed vision of the Church has emerged through the Irish Synodal Pathway, shaped by prayer, listening, and shared discernment. The five pathways outlined above are not separate models of Church, nor do they replace the seven priorities discerned through the synodal process. Rather, they offer complementary expressions of a single ecclesial vision: a Church rooted in Baptism, renewed in its mission to proclaim the Gospel, shaped by communion, committed to healing and accompaniment, and empowered through co-responsibility. Together, they describe the kind of Church that many have sensed the Holy Spirit calling forth in Ireland today. If this is the vision to which we are being called, the challenge before us is to give it concrete expression in the life of our parishes, dioceses, and communities. The proposals that follow are offered to the National Synodal Assembly as practical ways of embodying this vision and advancing the renewal of the Church in Ireland.

“Wherever possible, lay and ordained ministers should be formed together to strengthen mutual understanding, trust and collaboration.”
– From the Working Group on Co-responsibility and Lay Ministry



Section 4

Reading the Signs of the Times: Why does this matter in Ireland today?

The preceding sections have invited us to receive again what has been heard through the Irish Synodal Pathway, to recognise the vision of Church that has emerged from that discernment, and to consider the pathways and proposals through which that vision might take concrete form.

We now turn to the context in which we are being called to live this out. The question before us is not simply what kind of Church we are called to become, but why this matters in Ireland today. Reading the signs of the times invites us to attend to the realities, hopes, wounds and challenges of the world we are called to serve, and to consider the proposals before the Assembly in light of that missionary context. As we read, we are invited to ask:

Which proposals offer realistic and hopeful ways of becoming more fully the Church described in the preceding sections?

Introduction

In Spring 2021 the Irish Bishops launched a national synodal pathway for the Church in Ireland, to lead to a National Synodal Assembly within five years. The whole Church family in Ireland was invited to journey together to discern what the Holy Spirit was asking of the Church in Ireland at this time.

The starting point for any reading of the signs of the times is “a gaze upon reality enlightened by the Gospel and rooted in Christ”.⁴ For that reason, the Irish Bishops, in launching the Irish Synodal Pathway, highlighted the challenges and opportunities presented by an Ireland undergoing rapid transformation. Over the past five years these challenges and opportunities have developed, and new realities have emerged, both globally and in Ireland. Together, these provide the backdrop for the National Synodal Assembly. Their impact can be seen in the diocesan submissions and other contributions to the preparation for the Assembly, just as they influenced the priorities that were proposed for pastoral action.

4 Leo XIV, “Ten years after *Amoris laetitia*: proclaiming the Gospel with families today,” § 1.

International Context

Global Tension

Since the Irish Synodal Pathway began there has been an escalation of international conflict and outright war. Conflicts around the world – in Ukraine, the Middle East, Sudan and elsewhere – have given substance to Pope Francis’ perception of “a world war being fought piecemeal”, with catastrophic loss of human life and destruction of infrastructure, housing and economic capacity. Behind these theatres of war lies “the spread of a culture of power” characterised by polarisation and violence and a multiplicity of local conflicts “reflecting a clash between opposing imperialisms” (*Magnifica Humanitas* §185). Wholesale population displacement has added to migration pressures, while a spiralling militarisation is diverting resources into ever more sophisticated technologies of destruction. As a result of this dynamic, the international rules-based system for the regulation of political and economic relations has been weakened, almost to the point of collapse. Geography no longer protects Ireland from these power dynamics, given our deep connectedness to international economic networks.

Technological Change

A related shift in the international context is the accelerated pace of technological change and the concentration of power and wealth made possible through converging technologies, including the transformative impact of AI. Ireland, North and South, has become an important centre for digital technology, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and data research. These developments raise serious ethical, social and environmental questions, but they also offer possibilities for health, education, accessibility, communication, and service of the common good. This places a particular responsibility upon the Church in Ireland to engage those shaping these technologies and to encourage innovation that serves human dignity, communities and creation.

Social Communication

A profound cultural shift related to technology has already occurred in the world of communications. The impact of social media has transformed social relations, models of learning, and public discourse. Along with the many benefits of new social media, the power now exists to create and transmit disinformation that erodes trust and to amplify differences of belief or opinion into social divisions reinforced by opposing tribes. These fractures tend to undermine any sense of shared identity and agreed methods of resolving differences. The pervasive impact of social media is particularly challenging for the young, whose greater vulnerability to bullying and exploitation has triggered widespread alarm. At a profound level digital transformation can “blur the boundaries between truth and falsehood, mixing facts with opinions”, in a way that erodes the very idea of a search for truth, an essential element of democracy and a foundation for the common good (*Magnifica Humanitas* §132).

Climate Crisis

Foreboding at the impact of the climate crisis has intensified as a result of the acceleration of global warming and the manifestation of its long-predicted impact on populations around the world. Despite these evident consequences, international support for policies and measures to reduce carbon emissions has weakened, while adaptation measures have been limited. The lack of concern on the part of many powerful interests about the human impact of the climate crisis, especially on the poorest populations and on pressures for international migration, reflect what

Pope Francis called a culture of indifference. He emphasised that the environmental crisis is not an isolated issue but rather the ecological aspect of a wider socio-economic crisis, such that “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” cannot be separated.

Political Fracture

A striking feature of contemporary society is the breakdown in the post-war consensus in the West regarding support for liberal democracy, the rule of law based on protection of human rights, and a mixed economy where public and market provision coexist within a regulated framework to limit inequality and curb monopoly power. Some have sought to foster a sense of crisis in the legitimacy of the State based on perceived failures to meet public expectations regarding economic welfare, social cohesion and public security and so to mobilise challenges to the foundations of liberal democracy. Aggravated by disinformation, polarisation is promoted by demonisation of the Other, often ethnic minorities. A coarsened political discourse categorises political opponents as enemies and so tends to undermine the deliberation and compromise which enables democracy to function. Extremists from left and right seek to suppress dissent from their preferred ideology, while conspiracy theories undermine the space for encounter and dialogue.

For our consideration

In a world marked by conflict, rapid technological change, ecological crisis, disinformation and increasing polarisation, what kind of Christian presence are we being called to offer? As we consider the proposals before us, how might they help form communities capable of accompaniment, dialogue, reconciliation and confident witness to the Gospel?



A Changing Ireland

Population

Since the Irish Bishops launched the Synodal Pathway in 2021, the transformation of Irish society to which they referred has continued at a rapid pace. The total population increased over that period by almost 10% in the South and a significantly lower 1.5% in the North, with net migration contributing the largest share of growth. Today 1 in 5 of the population in the South and 1 in 8 in the North were born outside Ireland. The demographic profile of the population is changing in other ways too: Ireland is now a somewhat older country, with those aged over 65 increasing by more than twice the rate of the total population since 2021.

Secularisation

While migration has led to a greater diversity of religious affiliation, secularisation has had a greater impact on the profile of religion: the proportion reporting no religious affiliation or atheism represented 15% of the population in the South and 17% in the North, while reported affiliation to Catholicism declined to just over 69%.

For our consideration

What do Ireland's growing diversity and changing patterns of religious belonging ask of the proposals before us? How might they help us become communities in which people can belong, encounter Christ, grow in faith, and be accompanied in their search for meaning and hope?

Housing

The rapid rate of population growth especially in the South has increased pressures on infrastructure and public services. This is most evident in the area of housing. In addition to the increase in total population, changing household patterns, including lower marriage rates and smaller families, have increased the level of demand for housing units. While pressure in the housing system, especially in large cities, is an international phenomenon, Dublin has been described as having perhaps the worst housing shortage in the developed world (*Financial Times*, 18/19 July 2026). Similar housing pressures are experienced around the country, including in some rural areas. The gravest manifestation of the housing crisis is the growth in the numbers of homeless people, including families reliant on emergency accommodation. In addition, many of those with their own homes are experiencing chronic financial pressure and associated stress as a result of high rents and mortgages.

Public Finances

The value of Irish economic output has grown strongly over recent decades. Foreign direct investment has been especially strong in the South in the most advanced sectors of the international economy, resulting in well-paid employment, while contributing remarkable levels of corporation tax to the Exchequer. These have in turn enabled sustained increases in public spending over recent years. However, many public services have struggled to keep pace with demand, while investment in infrastructure – not only housing but also energy, transport and water – have lagged significantly behind the pace of population growth and the ambition for decarbonisation. The accelerating pace of technological change and the threats to the globalised economic system have increased the perceived vulnerability of significant amounts of tax revenue and associated public expenditure in the South and so of Ireland's economic and fiscal model.

The structure of the economy in the North is significantly different with larger public sector share and so greater impact from the UK economic and fiscal performance. In both parts of the island, as in much of the international economy, the outlook is uncertain.

For our consideration

How do these pressures shape the lives of the people and families our communities seek to accompany? As we consider the proposals before us, what would it mean for our parishes and other faith communities to respond to how people experience reality, particularly where isolation, financial pressure or insecurity make family and community life more difficult?

Public Life

Ireland has not escaped the polarisation seen across much of the world. Limited electoral success has not prevented the emergence of organised groups who seek to exploit grievances beyond the bounds of legitimate protest by targeting minority groups categorised as outsiders, as well as politicians, those charged with upholding the rule of law and those who defend the rights and interests of minorities. Particularly cynical attempts have been made to justify the fostering of division and even hatred as a defence of Christian civilisation.

Intolerance in mainstream political discourse has also sought to exclude voices of dissent from the prevailing orthodoxy regarding the right to life and the rights of conscience. Apart from the obvious reality that the right to life is the foundation of all other human rights, excluding such views from mainstream political discourse is scarcely consistent with a holistic view of human rights which is a defining feature of liberal democracy.

For our consideration

In a society where disagreement can so readily become division, what might our own Church life witness to? How might the proposals before us help our communities become places of listening, encounter and reconciliation, where difference can be held within communion and the dignity of each person is honoured?

A Changing Church

No less than Irish society, the Catholic Church in Ireland is experiencing drastic change, both within its life as a community of faith and in its place and role within the wider society.

A framing context for change is the continuing impact of what the Irish Bishops in 2021 referred to as “the shocking revelations” of the scale of institutional and clerical abuse and “the deep trauma felt by so many in the body of Christ and the need for inner healing and hope”. The pursuit of full disclosure, accountability and atonement continues to shape the place of the Church in Irish society and to cast a shadow over its mission and ministry. The trauma experienced by survivors of abuse continues when incidents of abuse return to the centre of public attention.

Despite the extensive efforts to promote safeguarding within the Church and the fact that newly reported instances of clerical abuse are much reduced in number and almost entirely historical in nature, the continuing revelations of past abuse, the prosecution of offenders, the pursuit of compensation and redress, and the continuing evolution of the story of abuse within the global Church, all contribute to the continuing consequences of abuse that, in the words of Pope Benedict XVI in his letter to Irish Catholics, “have obscured the light of the Gospel to a degree that not even centuries of persecution succeeded in doing”.

The accelerating decline in the number of priests and religious in active ministry in Ireland, reflected in the continuing closure of religious institutions, represents almost a retreat from the landscape of what not long ago had been the most prominent expression of the Church’s presence and ministry. The decline in number and the aging of priests engaged in parish ministry has also led to measures of cooperation and consolidation which, while enhancing pastoral capacity, can also be seen as a marker of decline. These changes are only the counterpart to a remarkable decline in active engagement in the life of the Church as reflected in attendance at Mass and, for example, the sharply reduced percentage of weddings solemnised in Catholic churches in the South to just over 30% in 2024.

However, the picture is not only one of decline. Every year, thousands of lay women and men undertake training for ministry and pastoral leadership, with growing numbers involved in Baptism and funeral teams, in parish preparation programmes for First Holy Communion and Confirmation and in delivering programmes of adult faith formation. The vibrancy of many parish pastoral councils and parish finance committees attest to the willingness of women and men to assume leadership positions and so exercise their baptismal calling to co-responsibility for the mission and witness of the Church within their communities.

There has been a reported increase in the number of young adults seeking out the Church and presenting themselves for Baptism and indications of higher level of participation in the liturgical life of the Church on the part of some young adults. This suggests that new avenues for encounter are emerging alongside the traditional nexus of home, school and parish. The numbers, albeit small, presenting for preparation for priesthood have stabilised and there has been a steady growth in the permanent diaconate, a relatively new form of ordained ministry in Ireland.

Another source of strength and vitality evident in the life of the Church is the contribution of those who have come to make their homes in Ireland over recent years. Families who have moved to Ireland from all parts of the world are bringing the strength of their own faith traditions – in some cases fostered by the ministry of Irish missionaries – and sharing their time and talents generously in building up their new parish home. In the same way, priests and religious from around the world have enriched the Church in Ireland through their generous service. The Irish missionary tradition imparted a particular character to the Irish Church; in our day, those who have come from abroad to minister here are bringing an enlivening depth of faith and breadth of experience.

The active and enthusiastic engagement in the Synodal Pathway by so many over the last number of years has shown the importance which they attach to their faith and their commitment to the flourishing of the Church. While far from universal in scope, the depth and range of participation have demonstrated that, despite a deep awareness of past failures and current shortcomings, many recognise the incomparable treasure of truth and hope and the experience of welcome and community which it is the privilege of the Church to share through its ministry. Many have engaged with the Synodal Pathway in the hope that it will widen and deepen the sense of welcome and inclusion which is often the most tangible expression of a living faith community. In the same way, pastoral renewal at parish and diocesan level has engaged the talents and skills of very many people who are saddened but not disheartened by the drift away from the traditions of the faith and by our failure to communicate effectively the transformative and liberating message of the Gospel.

For our consideration

These realities bring us particularly close to the task before the National Synodal Assembly. How might the proposals before us respond faithfully to a Church carrying the wounds of its past while undergoing profound change in ministry, participation and leadership? How might they enable the gifts of women and men, young and old, lay and ordained, families, religious and people from different cultures to contribute more fully to our shared life and mission?

A Context for Mission

Jesus came that we might have life to the full, finding true happiness by living in right relationship with the One in whose image we are made, and with each other, all daughters and sons of God. This message of hope and healing is for all people, at all times. For the people of our time, it is a message of hope to be heard especially by those who discover the failure of other pathways in contemporary society to answer the longings of the human heart. At a global level, the casualties of war, the gross inequalities of income and wealth, the climate crisis aggravated by human behaviour, and the tensions created by competing power blocs and mass migration, all have caused immense human suffering. Prevailing ideologies of wealth and power calculate the worth of individuals by accumulation of possessions or domination by force. Human relationships and communal solidarity have been distorted by a cult of the individual, locked in a ceaseless struggle for autonomy and control. The quest for meaning has too often been displaced by competition for elusive ciphers of success.

By contrast, in the light of the Gospel the Church insists that “human dignity does not depend on a person’s abilities, wealth or position in life, nor on the right or wrong choices made; instead, it is a gift that precedes and transcends each person, endowed by God as an expression of his unfailing love” (*Magnifica Humanitas* §50). This is the source of what Pope Leo has called “the grandeur of humanity” which finds its fullest expression in the Incarnation, Jesus Christ as “the Way, the Truth and the Life, opening the path for each of us to grow towards fullness” (*Magnifica Humanitas* §1). Human dignity is not expressed in a self-referential pursuit of autonomy, but rather “in our capacity to reflect critically, choose and love freely, and form authentic relationships” (*Magnifica Humanitas* §233). This vision of human dignity entails the conviction that true human flourishing can only be achieved through pursuit of the common good, challenging as it may be to discern and to secure.

In proclaiming the Gospel and in witnessing to its message of salvation, the Church in Ireland places itself at the service of the whole community. In seeking to discern what the Holy Spirit is asking of the Church we are also committing ourselves to participating with the wider Irish society in seeking to answer questions which can no longer be avoided: “Where are we going? Towards what goal do we wish to orient ourselves? What direction should we choose as people and as a human community?” (*Magnifica Humanitas* §6). The Church wishes “to engage in dialogue with the men and women of our time, with whom we share in the events, questions and aspirations” of the present reality “to seek to identify new paths for the common good and for promoting a dignified life for all” (*Magnifica Humanitas* §2). In this process, the Church offers from its tradition “principles for thought, criteria for discernment and judgement, and concrete guidelines for action” (*Magnifica Humanitas* §3). In doing so, the Church understands truth not as a territory to be defended, but a good to be shared and so does not seek to occupy positions of power or to defend cultural strongholds: “the truth of the Gospel is not imposed from above but grows over time within the concrete interweaving of lives, communities, and cultures” (*Magnifica Humanitas* §25).

The Church recognises the urgency of the call to conversion, so that the temptation to nostalgia for the past or blind defence of the status quo do not impede the mission of proclaiming the Good News. In particular, listening to the victims of spiritual, economic, institutional, sexual, and power-based abuse, as well as abuse of conscience will continue to be an integral part of that journey of conversion.



Section 5

Proposals for Pathways for the Church in Ireland

Preparing for the Irish National Synodal Assembly 2026

- In response to the key question that has guided the Synodal pathway in Ireland, **“What does God want from the Church in Ireland at this time?”**, the many proposals now before the Synodal Pathway can be grouped into five pathways with a number of proposals in each.
- The work of discernment begins before delegates gather for the National Synodal Assembly. Delegates will not be given time at the Assembly to read and absorb the Working Document for the first time. They are asked to read and reflect prayerfully on this Working Document in advance and to engage with the diocese, community, organisation or body from which they come. In particular, they should give careful consideration to the proposals, listening for where they recognise the fruits of the discernment of the Irish Synodal Pathway, where they perceive a call to action, and where questions or concerns remain. Delegates should therefore come to the Assembly having already engaged seriously with the proposals and prepared to bring the fruits of that reflection and local discernment into the prayerful space of the Assembly.
- At the Assembly, this prior discernment will be deepened through prayer, listening, and conversation. Delegates will then be invited to indicate, in relation to each proposal, whether the Assembly **“highly recommends it”, “recommends it”, “considers that it needs further discernment”, or “does not recommend it”**. These responses are not intended as a simple exercise in voting, but as a means of expressing the discernment of the Assembly after the proposals have been prayerfully considered both locally and together.
- Delegates are also welcome to consult the full texts of the reports of the Working Groups by using the links in the Appendix of this document where the process of the discernment of the proposals, together with their rationale and suggested implementation, can be accessed.

Pathway 1: The Church that Proclaims the Gospel

“Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations”

(Matthew 28:19)

Be missionary disciples that go forth

Introduction

Faithful to Christ’s mandate to “go, make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19), the Church strives to share the joy of the Gospel. The Church has a message to give and to communicate. The proposals in this pathway involve outreach to young people, dialogue with people who might seem or feel “marginalised” and shaping the Church as a more co-responsible missionary subject.

In considering this pathway, it is important to recognise that the Catholic Church in Ireland is not starting from scratch in the venture of proclaiming the Gospel. There is plenty of evidence of both familiar and new forms of proclaiming the Gospel. The familiar form takes place daily across parishes, religious communities and movements in the regular celebration of the sacraments, the sharing of one’s faith experience with peers or with family members, and closeness to one another in times of parish celebration or times of bereavement. Mention must be made of the great *ad gentes* missionary zeal that characterised Irish Catholicism over the centuries.

While the difficulty today of transmitting the Gospel is recognised as a European-wide challenge, the Church in Ireland can be grateful for a cultural closeness on the part of many to the Gospel message. People appreciate the good impact of Gospel-inspired organisations such as the Legion of Mary, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and *Trócaire* as well as social and youth services established in some dioceses. Over the years various courses, programmes and resources (for instance, the *Grow in Love* programme for primary schools and the *Do this in Memory* programme for school-parish collaboration) have been developed to assist in proclaiming the Gospel in parish, school and community settings. Movements and communities have offered opportunities to young and older members for a greater knowledge of the faith, community belonging, and social commitment.

In 2011 the Bishops’ Conference launched the *Share the Good* news initiative that proposed possibilities for evangelisation and catechesis in various strands of Church life. Ecumenical dialogue that is often centred on the Word of God has gone ahead. The Inter-Church Meeting and various ecumenical initiatives have been consolidated across the island in the past sixty years. Various youth ministry initiatives in dioceses, religious congregations and movements have borne fruit and continue to do so, not least in summer camps and prayer moments, pilgrimages and World Youth Days.

The Catholic Education Partnership’s *A Vision for Catholic Schools in Ireland*, based on recent years of experience and reflection, has recently re-proposed a vision for schools inspired by the Gospel. The Catholic Schools Week, with the Grandparents Day as a highlight, has become an annual moment to focus on the Gospel values underpinning the characteristic spirit of Catholic schools.

As witnessed in the development of diocesan and parish websites and *Facebook* pages, and the work of the Catholic Communications Office and *iCatholic*, as well as a greater use of apps, podcasts and *Instagram* among youth initiatives and Church groups, there is a growing digital literacy emerging across the Church in Ireland aimed at proclaiming the Gospel in new ways for today, reaching people who might not come regularly to church.

The *National Synthesis* of 2022 reported that during the consultations, “it was recognised that the Church has a life-giving vision for the world in its social teaching and that the Church has the potential to be a force for the common good in our society”. It could be said that the synodal conversations only occasionally drew out reflection and comment on the social vision of the Gospel. It was more implicit than explicit. What the conversations brought to light was the need for Catholic Church communities at all levels to undergo a conversion to ensure the Church is living out more fully in its own inner life the Gospel values it wants to propose to others.



Proposal 1: Building communion with those who struggle to see the relevance of the Church

Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that dioceses and local faith communities identify local needs in order to create a programme of outreach.

The What: Belonging means reaching out to members of the community who have drifted away from the Church and/or those who have not been members of the Church. To meet with them in a 'neutral' setting and interact with them in a way that shows the Gospel values through dialogue and encounter. To encounter others in dialogue relating to them as individuals, listening to them, hearing their stories, establishing what would nourish them, and enabling them to reconnect with the God who is love and who welcomes everyone.

The Why: To enrich and build up the faith community with a renewed sense of family, welcome, and acceptance. Moving into new spaces to encounter others.

The How: Dioceses and local faith communities would identify local needs in order to create a programme of outreach and to offer spaces where people can speak honestly about faith, doubt and disillusionment. Develop creative and appropriate ways of connecting with those who have fallen away for whatever reason, assuring them they still belong, to build trust and to shift the model from maintenance to mission. Previous listening processes and outreaches would inform new efforts.



Proposal 2: Rooting belonging in practice: challenging the language and style at universal level



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that the Church in Ireland would ask the universal Church to develop a more respectful and life-giving vocabulary when speaking about LGBT+ people.

The What: With due regard for the Church's long-established teaching on human sexuality, and mindful of the report of Study Group 9 of the Synod on Synodality, that the Church in Ireland would take a lead in calling the universal Church to employ respectful language in relation to LGBT+ people. That the Church in Ireland would also explore ways of showing visible support and care to people in the LGBT+ communities and demonstrating that we as a Church do welcome them.

The Why: To affirm the dignity and worth of every person, made in the image and likeness of God, and loved by him. To raise awareness of the Church's mission to speak truth with compassion, humility, and pastoral sensitivity, and of the importance of language in how people encounter the Gospel and experience a sense of belonging in the community of faith.

The How: Continued spiritual discernment and application through the various opportunities and pathways that are presented at national, European and universal levels. On-going theological engagement, and future synods and assemblies.

Proposal 3: A renewed emphasis on inter-Church encounter and dialogue in everything we do in the Catholic Church in Ireland

Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that the Irish Episcopal Conference engages with dioceses to develop a national plan on visible expressions of oneness in Christ.

The What: Being in dialogue, walking together, is a visible expression of belonging to Christ and his Church. Local inter-Church encounters are generally left to older people in local settings and often are associated with Northern Ireland alone. All communities in the Church in Ireland must be called to renew the sense of ecumenical dialogue and accompaniment locally. There is a challenge for us to invite younger people to encounter Christ through shared moments of prayer, study and witness in the community.

The Why: As Ireland becomes more secularised and multicultural, there is a need for us all to bring our Christian witness to the fore in a range of areas that will help us be peacemakers, build reconciliation and social cohesion across the whole island and to show practical care for our communities and our planet, that is rooted in the Gospel.

The How: The Irish Episcopal Conference would engage with dioceses to explore how best the call to be one in Christ can be given visible expression locally today, in the light of current circumstances. From that, a national plan with objectives could be discerned and devised in order to establish and support visible structures and pathways for encounter and dialogue that are open to people more locally.



Proposal 4: Developing the parish/local faith community as a faith formation space



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that parishes and local faith communities are reclaimed as spaces where faith formation is central, holistic, lifelong, relational, and co-responsible.

The What: A parish is a place of welcome, dialogue and searching, where faith formation is central to parish life, where a real continuum of care can be found for the believer and searcher, and “a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey and a centre of constant missionary outreach” (*Evangelii Gaudium* §28). It is continuous and developmental across the whole life cycle including children, adults, parents, and new members. This also creates more shared co-responsible ownership of who provides faith formation. Faith formation is co-produced by parish, home, and school. This implies stronger parish leadership in catechesis, deeper parental involvement and collaborative frameworks rather than parallel systems.

The Why: Many more people would experience support for their journey of faith, across all ages and stages. The parish would no longer be just a place where people turn up to celebrate sacraments, but would be renewed through a focus on faith formation.

The How: A comprehensive and intergenerational formation framework for parishes would be developed, actively promoting ongoing adult faith development. The parish would welcome and accompany those who are searching and exploring what it means to belong to the Christian community, and for those who wish, continue this through the Order of Christian Initiation for Adults (OCIA). Space for faith and dialogue that embraces the signs of the times by engaging with the social teaching of the Church. Within a catechetical framework, develop more flexible sacramental pathways responding to diverse situations and parish family support groups and networks. Empowering and equipping parents as primary educators in faith.

Proposal 5: Youth co-ordinators and youth advisory committees



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that dioceses, congregations, movements, and associations appoint a youth co-ordinator to be supported by a youth advisory committee.

The What: Dioceses, congregations and movements in Ireland would appoint a suitably qualified youth co-ordinator, full-time or part-time depending on resources. Smaller dioceses, congregations, and movements might consider collaborating. In addition, each diocese, congregation, and movement would be encouraged to establish a youth advisory committee reflecting a diverse cross-section of youth, young adults and those involved in youth ministry in order to contribute to strategic vision and planning, and to embody the shared discernment described in *Christus Vivit* (§206–208).

The Why: To strengthen the Church's capacity to evangelise and accompany young people. Ensure youth ministry is strategic, sustainable, and mission-focused across the island of Ireland. Foster a culture of listening, participation, and shared responsibility (*Christus Vivit* §206). Create pathways for young people to exercise leadership and co-responsibility in the Church (*Christus Vivit* §170, 174). Ultimately, it aims to cultivate vibrant faith communities where young people encounter Christ, grow in discipleship, and contribute actively to the Church's mission.

The How: Implementation should take place at diocesan, congregational, movement, regional, and national levels.

Each diocese, congregation, and movement would determine the appropriate level and qualification at which a youth director would be appointed, or provide refresher training for those already in post. The role would include: formation of leaders at local level; fostering belonging; facilitating encounters with Christ and proclamation of the kerygma; accompaniment of young people; programme development; collaboration with the Sub-Committee for Evangelisation and Youth Ministry of the IEC Council for Evangelisation, Catechesis and Pastoral Renewal; and enabling synodal listening through the youth advisory committee (*Christus Vivit* §244–247).

Responding to the call for young people to be “protagonists” (*Christus Vivit* §174), each diocese, congregation, and movement would appoint a youth advisory committee. Establish clear terms of reference to determine membership (youth, experience, gender balance, etc.), including a defined term of service (e.g. three years). The Bishop, Provincial, or Movement Leader should commission the committee, with the youth co-ordinator acting as facilitator and decision-taker with decisions ratified by Bishop/Provincial/Movement Leader (*Christus Vivit* §96, 203). Build on and connect with the committee for Evangelisation and Youth Ministry of the IEC council for Evangelisation, Catechesis and Pastoral Renewal.

Proposal 6: Establish pathways of intentional discipleship for youth and young adults



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that parishes, local faith communities, schools, and chaplaincies develop pathways of intentional discipleship for youth and young adults.

The What: This proposal outlines a parish/pastoral unit-based approach to forming intentional disciples among youth and young adults. Its aim is to help create welcoming communities where younger generations can encounter Christ, grow in faith and participate actively in the life and mission of the Church. The initiative proposes two interconnected pathways: one for youth and one for young adults, moving from evangelisation to discipleship, leadership and mission.

The Why: The pathways would create consistent faith opportunities for youth and young adults, foster Christian belonging and supportive relationships, and increase participation in parish life and mission. Through the provision of transformative experiences such as retreats and pilgrimages, young people could be formed as intentional disciples and equipped as young leaders for peer evangelisation and mentoring.

The How: Identify pilot parishes or pastoral units, recruit leaders, establish safeguarding structures and provide training in accompaniment, evangelisation and youth ministry. Establish regular youth/young adult gatherings and welcoming spaces for discussion, icebreakers, prayer and community using age-appropriate evangelisation resources. Support participants through ongoing Catholic formation, Bible studies, mentorship, retreats, pilgrimages and opportunities for deeper discipleship and encounter with Christ. Invite young people into leadership, peer ministry and missionary outreach within parish and community life. Encourage opportunities for youth ministers, volunteers, clergy and parish leaders to share best practice and learn from one another through retreats, gatherings or conferences. Regular evaluation and reflection should support effectiveness, growth and long-term sustainability.

Proposal 7: A national digital strategy for youth-focused online content



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that the Irish Episcopal Conference develop a national digital evangelisation strategy with a youth focus to strengthen and coordinate the Church's presence in digital spaces.

The What: Drawing on national and international best practice, the strategy would provide a clear framework for evangelisation online and offer practical resources for dioceses, parishes, religious orders and Catholic organisations to engage effectively through digital platforms and form digital missionaries. The strategy would recognise that young people increasingly encounter faith online before they encounter it in parish or academic settings.

The Why: To increase digital reach and visibility for the Church. Greater engagement with under-35 audiences. Increased participation in online faith communities. Improved digital literacy and capacity among Church leaders and ministries. Shared resources and templates for youth ministry. Stronger and more visible evangelisation among young people. More consistent national messaging aligned with Church teaching.

The How: The Irish Episcopal Conference would initially establish a working group to develop a five-year national digital evangelisation strategy. The working group would articulate a clear rationale for digital evangelisation; ensure safeguarding and ethical standards are followed; identify opportunities for collaboration with Catholic platforms, influencers, youth organisations and content creators; provide practical guidance and resources for dioceses, parishes and organisations.

Proposal 8: Engaging with Irish society in discerning the common good



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that the Church at all levels foster appreciation of the principles of Catholic social teaching so that it may engage with Irish society in discerning the common good at a time of great change and challenge.

The What: A response to the call of Pope Leo XIV for Catholics to become involved with all men and women of good will in discerning the common good and defending human dignity by reading the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel and the developed principles of Catholic social teaching.

The Why: Wider appreciation of the social implications of the Gospel and of the richness of the Church's social teaching will better equip the Church at all levels to contribute to building communion and participating in the common task of promoting human flourishing at a time of great social, economic and technological change.

The How: Drawing on the insights provided by Pope Leo in *Magnifica Humanitas*, Catholic social teaching should feature in the formation programmes offered by all ecclesial communities. In this context, learning materials should be developed for use by Church communities in understanding and promoting the principles of Catholic social teaching and applying them in reading the signs of the times in Ireland today and in addressing key challenges, such as the climate crisis, the threats and opportunities of rapid technological change and the promotion of social justice.

Pathway 2: The Church as a Community of Belonging

“While he was still a long way off, his father saw him.”

(Luke 15:20)

Be a people that welcomes and fosters communion

Introduction

The Gospels depict Christ as a welcoming figure. He frequently welcomes those who are marginalised in the society of his time such as public sinners, lepers, tax collectors, foreigners, women, etc., and is not afraid to challenge the exclusionary attitudes of the Jewish authorities. His welcome of the child – a symbol of vulnerability and considered to be of lesser significance in the social order – is perhaps the most striking of all: “anyone who welcomes a little child such as this in my name, welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me, welcomes not me but the one who sent me” (Mark 9:37). The key principle at work is clear: Christ identifies with the vulnerable, and therefore to welcome the vulnerable is to welcome Christ. This is even raised to an eschatological level when Christ teaches that final judgement will be made according to the criterion of whether his followers succeeded or failed in recognising him in those who were in need: “In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me. ... In so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me” (Matthew 25:31-46).

The example of Christ as a welcoming figure goes beyond those in need to those who were shunned or outcast. He is criticised for eating “with tax collectors and sinners” (e.g. Matthew 9:11) – eating being a significant expression of hospitality and sharing in the life of the other. The parable of the Prodigal Son explores the complex dynamics of welcome for those who have wandered far from the community that seeks to remain faithful to the Father.

Welcome must always be a feature of the life of the Church, and we should not be surprised to observe many forms of outreach in the life of the Church in Ireland that seek to welcome. Parishes, religious congregations, and institutes of consecrated life offer many forms of welcome, not only through the celebration of the liturgy and the sacraments, but also through various initiatives that reach out beyond the church buildings to individuals and communities. From signage at church doors, to a “ministry of welcome” at Sunday Masses, and to the provision of hospitality after particular celebrations, the message is one of welcome. Special liturgies and celebrations are organised to celebrate diversity in the local community, and ethnic communities seeking to celebrate the liturgy in their own language and rites are welcomed. Some parishes took a lead in mobilising parishioners and the local community to welcome and support those fleeing the war in Ukraine. The Irish Episcopal Council for Immigrants fosters initiatives throughout the island of Ireland for the pastoral care of immigrants. During the International Eucharistic Congress in 2012, many parishes were enriched by welcoming pilgrims, families, and groups from other countries. Our Catholic schools continue to distinguish themselves as leaders in social inclusion as they welcome children from a wide diversity of ethnic, social, and religious backgrounds.

The proposals under this pathway seek to strengthen and broaden the Church's ability to be a place of belonging. Many dioceses have undertaken listening and consultation processes to discern what it is to be a Church that welcomes, and how it might be possible to go beyond boundaries. The consultation as part of the Irish Synodal Pathway identified a need for the Church in Ireland to offer a welcome to those who, whether for reasons of personal choice or perception, feel that they are not welcome in the Church. Some parishes and religious communities are already making efforts in this regard to welcome and accompany those who feel that they cannot belong in the Church.

The image of "home" is not universally experienced as positive by everyone – many carry a burden of trauma and painful memory because of their experience of conflict, abuse, neglect, and disfunction in the home setting. Yet the longing for a home, for a place of belonging, lies deep in the heart of every person. The welcoming ministry of the Church is in the first instance an invitation into belonging and communion, so that all God's children may find their place among the People of God as together we journey towards our heavenly home. To belong is not an end in itself, but rather a step in building the communion of the Body of Christ. The proposals in this pathway seek to be at the service of communion.



Proposal 1: A ministry of listening, welcoming, and belonging in dioceses / parishes throughout Ireland

Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that dioceses begin discerning the process of establishing in parishes or pastoral areas a “ministry of listening and belonging.”

The What: A simple, visible ministry made up of trained parishioners and clergy, whose role is to be present, to listen deeply, and to welcome people; especially those who feel unsure of their place in the Church.

The Why: A purposeful approach to listening and belonging at the local level would gently change the culture of our parishes from programmes to relationships, from assumption to attentiveness, and from silence to honest encounter. It would also ensure that parish communities across Ireland remain connected with each other as vibrant centres of belonging.

The How: Drawing on previous similar listening processes, dioceses would undertake an assessment of community connection and begin a conversation locally on what belonging means in each parish and to identify needs. Development of programmes (catechesis, adult faith development, liturgical ministries, family ministry, social care, care of creation, community outreach etc) that will provide people with a real sense of belonging at the most basic and important level of the Church, i.e. the local parish community.



Proposal 2: A national commission for faith-based social infrastructure and abiding

Proposal:

This Assembly recommends a practical, research-driven commission to map out and strengthen the local support networks for different kinds of belonging that faith communities already provide across Ireland.

The What: To move past just talking about welcoming people and instead focus on how real encounters of belonging are being fostered and how that can be strengthened. This commission will find what is already working well, share those lessons across the country, and show how the church can help wider society as it fulfils its apostolic mission.

The Why: Real partnership with migrant communities. Turn empty spaces into community assets. Provide the State and local authorities with hard data which demonstrates the on-going relevance and contribution of faith to our shared life.

The How: Map out every diocese to identify the local churches and groups that currently act as primary safety nets for people in need. Seek support for research funding to build a complete record of the under-used facilities available to find support new initiatives.



Proposal 3: Pathways of belonging for young people through pilgrimages and gatherings

Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that dioceses, individually or in partnership, prioritise annual pilgrimages and regular regional gatherings for youth (12–17) and young adults (18–35).

The What: Pilgrimages and gatherings are intended not simply as isolated events, but as pathways into ongoing accompaniment, discipleship and active participation in parish and diocesan life.

The Why: To foster a stronger sense of belonging and Christian community among young people; create opportunities for encounter with Christ through pilgrimage, prayer and shared faith experiences; strengthen relationships between young people, parishes and dioceses; encourage participation in the sacramental and communal life of the Church; support sustainable youth and young adult communities at parish and diocesan level.

The How: Annual diocesan pilgrimages, individually or collaboratively, for young people and young adults. Regular gatherings at local, diocesan or regional levels to help sustain and deepen the fruits of pilgrimage experiences. A National Youth Pilgrimage to Knock. Greater active collaboration and sharing of resources, experience, training and successful initiatives to help strengthen outreach and build stronger connections.



Proposal 4: Ministry with the Travelling People



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends the fuller participation of members of the Travelling People in the wider life of the Church based on genuine, respectful, and reciprocal relationships.

The What: To actively confront and dismantle the systemic prejudice, misunderstanding, and social exclusion endured by the Travelling People within the Church and wider society.

The Why: To build on the deep, historic faith roots within the Travelling People, so as to further enrich our local parishes with the true diversity of the People of God.

The How: Identify and support parish team leaders to undergo anti-racism and cultural competency training. Cultivate safe, shared spaces where settled and Traveller Catholics can share their faith stories, break down stereotypes, and build genuine friendship. Ensure Church projects are co-designed and co-led by members of the both the settled community and Travelling People. Create prioritised pathways into leadership and parish, diocesan, and national level for members of the Travelling People.

Proposal 5: Women visible and valued in liturgy, public prayer and the discourse of faith

Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that women, and women's voices, be visible, heard, and valued in liturgy and public prayer at all levels of the Church in Ireland.

The What: To re-balance our Church's unconscious bias.

The Why: So that women and girls experience themselves as included and respected in their full humanity, and thereby know themselves as full members, called and chosen. That inclusion becomes the norm not the aspiration at every level.

The How: All church members and leaders be given the opportunity, education, and information to recognise women and girls as full participants in the Good News and in the life of the Church. A thorough and systematic examination and correction of texts, hymnals, and other materials that do not recognise the baptismal dignity of all persons. That the language of the Divine Feminine, as expressed throughout our scriptures, and by women saints, mystics, and scholars be proactively rediscovered and normalised as expressions of God. That a liturgical season, (e.g. the Easter Season), be upheld as a season of special focus in which we highlight the discipleship of the women of our scriptures who proclaimed Christ, the wisdom of the holy women, mystics and saints of our tradition, as well as contemporary women's voices, experience, gift-sharing, and leadership at all levels of the Church.



Proposal 6: A national office for women (mainstreaming women's inclusion)



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends the establishment of a national office for women.

The What: A national office, at the level of the Irish Episcopal Conference, to be a witness to the Church's communal commitment at parish and diocesan levels in Ireland to the full inclusion of women.

The Why: To oversee and support root and branch culture change, which would enable the full participation of women in line with the equal dignity bestowed by Baptism and recognised in the Church's documents.

The How: Support national agencies and committees working towards similar aims for women. Develop clear procedures and resources to support grassroots engagement, from discussion to employment, ministry to formation. To offer periodic reports and timely assessments on impediments and opportunities for the full engagement of women.

Pathway 3: The Church as a Place of Healing

“Unbind him, let him go free”

(John 11:44)

Be a healing community

Introduction

The worldwide image of the Church in Ireland is now one of a Church deeply wounded. Church leadership in Ireland has formally and publicly acknowledged its sinfulness and woundedness, particularly regarding systemic institutional abuse, cover-ups, and the historical mistreatment of vulnerable individuals in Ireland. Addressing these failures, the Church in Ireland has put in place policies to prevent abuse and to foster a positive culture for children in the Church. The *National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland* leads and oversees the Church’s work of safeguarding which depends on thousands of volunteers across the country who serve their parishes and communities as safeguarding representatives.

The Synodal Pathway has heard the voice of those who continue to carry a burden of pain. In the initial “diocesan phase” of the universal synod which led to the *National Synthesis* of 2022, the legacy of abuse was described as an “open wound”. It was also acknowledged that the synodal process had “generated a clear imperative to place this issue at the heart of any Church renewal and reform”. Our woundedness is now part of our story.



Addressing this woundedness in our story, the *Towards Healing Counselling and Support Service* succeeded *Faoiseamh* in 2011 and provides professional services to people who have experienced institutional, clerical, or religious abuse in Ireland, as well as to the relatives of survivors. *Towards Peace* is a service established following a two-year listening process between survivors and the Irish Bishops which offers spiritual support.

To ensure that the memory of this woundedness is not confined only to those directly affected, the Friday after Ash Wednesday every year is now designated as a day of prayer for survivors and victims of abuse, with many parishes and communities also lighting “a candle of atonement”. We also recall the moving Penitential Rite composed by Pope Francis for the Mass in the Phoenix Park in 2018, when he prayed that the Lord would “preserve and increase this sense of shame and repentance, and grant us the strength to ensure that it never happens again and that justice is done”⁵.

Yet healing in the life and mission of the Church is broader than safeguarding alone. We must humbly acknowledge that the Church has not always loved everyone as it should, and so the experience and courageous truth-telling of all victims and survivors must remain foundational to what the Church is learning about healing. The call to become a healing community also reaches into experiences of woundedness, exclusion, broken relationships and loss, and into the Church’s wider vocation to be an instrument of reconciliation, justice, peace and hope.

The proposals in this pathway speak of a Church that desires to be a community at the service of those who have been wounded so that it can become a community of healing, reconciliation, and peace.

5 https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180826_omelia-dublino.html

Proposal 1: Explicit commitment to healing as a priority in the future work of the synodal process



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that the Irish Episcopal Conference and the Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI) explicitly commit to maintaining “healing” as a priority in future synodal processes.

The What: The prophetic witness of victims and survivors has greatly enriched and strengthened the synodal process. An explicit priority commitment in this area would help ensure this work would receive the attention and investment required. Healing in this context would be defined as follows:

Guided by the example of Christ whose ministry of healing was often conducted at the margins of society, bringing listening, connection and hope, the synodal process in the Church in Ireland affirms the need to keep a consistent priority on healing at the heart of its work. This includes and builds on the work that has been done to respond to the needs of victims and survivors of abuse and extends that learning into engagement with other groups of people who have been wounded by their experience of marginalisation and exclusion in the Church, offering meaningful opportunities for truth-telling, accompanied by a commitment to transformative action.

The Why: To maintain consistent continued attention to healing as part of the synodal process, grounded in a definition that is both wide-ranging and specific, offering the hope that this will contribute to a continued building of trust with those who have suffered and that their truth-telling might lead to transformation.

The How: That the Irish Episcopal Conference and The Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI) would approve this proposal and accompanying definition. That this priority would be included in the terms of reference for the future office(s)/bodies tasked with taking forward the work of synodality at national level (and diocesan levels if applicable).

Proposal 2: A commission for healing



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that the Irish Episcopal Conference and the Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI) establish a commission for healing.

The What: A practical path toward healing in a wounded church must begin with mechanisms centred on truth, accountability, and sustained care. Building on previous and existing work in this area, and developing new initiatives with a diverse range of participants, to ensure balanced and credible oversight.

The Why: The commission would contribute to the development of a renewed structural approach to safeguarding and inclusion within the Church in Ireland, thereby supporting comprehensive and enduring processes of institutional and communal healing. The commission would work in partnership with relevant Church bodies in areas such as the following:

- Research into the underlying factors that caused – and may continue to contribute towards abuse in the Church – so as to not only understand past failures, but to ensure lasting institutional reform and transparency.
- Facilitating a one-Church approach to maximise opportunities for collaboration, make best use of available resources and increasing the visibility of the work that is happening.
- Consultation and listening, building on what has already been done and establishing appropriate methodologies to continue the work of listening and consultation leading to action.
- Acknowledgement and accountability in respect of current safeguarding commitments and lessons from the past.
- Recommendations on memorialisation of the suffering that has occurred, combined with the development of educational materials to inform training for ministry and wider institutional learning.
- Coordinating access to records held by religious bodies and/or passed over to state agencies.

Proposal 2 (continued)

- Recommendations for reform:
 - for action on participation and decision-making processes in the Church;
 - for action on issues of language and culture in the Church;
 - for the integration of learning from previous inquiries and consultations into areas such as seminary formation, leadership training, safeguarding practice and governance structures.
- Restorative justice.
- Sustainability of safeguarding work and addressing risks for the future.

The How: The Irish Episcopal Conference would approve the establishment of a commission for healing in partnership with AMRI. A diverse range of participants would be recruited composed of women and men, young people, victim/survivors, family representatives, safeguarding experts, clergy, lay leaders, women religious, and members of the LGBT+ community, ensuring balanced and credible oversight. The terms of reference would be mutually agreed between the Irish Episcopal Conference and AMRI through a process of co-design, with a suggested initial timeframe of two years, and would be sufficiently open to allow the experience of members to shape and inform the scope of the work and the methodologies to be employed.



Proposal 3: Places of encounter



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that “places of encounter” be developed across the island of Ireland to provide accessible, structured, welcoming spaces for listening, storytelling, and accompaniment.

The What: The development of “places of encounter” across the country (within the different local diocesan and religious congregational settings) to provide opportunities for victims/survivors, and others who have experienced hurt or exclusion, to share their stories in dignity and safety. These spaces would be living environments of engagement, dialogue, and pastoral care. They would embody a shift from “doing for” to “doing with,” fostering authentic relationships and shared responsibility within the Church community.

The Why: Visible acceptance of the enormity of what has occurred. Recognition of the need to move beyond siloed structures towards a more integrated “one Church” approach, where healing is visible, local, and ongoing. Moving beyond memorialisation to creating opportunities for prayerful reflection and dialogue, inviting people to engage with the reality of this suffering and the hope that emerges from the work of healing.

The How: A group with relevant experience, which would include victims and survivors (e.g. a commission for healing) would develop a set of guidelines to shape and inform the work of creating “places of encounter” in different local contexts (dioceses, religious congregations, etc.). Such guidelines would seek to strike a careful balance between unifying principles and flexibility, to create spaces where a diverse range of people could engage prayerfully with the testimony of victims and survivors, in a spirit of lament for the harm that has been caused, appreciation for the courageous truth-telling that has initiated processes of change, and an openness to learning the lessons of the past to prevent future harm.

Proposal 4: The pastoral care of women at the margins



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that the relevant office of the Irish Episcopal Conference partner with other agencies to offer pastoral care to women at the margins who struggle because of exclusion and dehumanisation.

The What: Many women need specific and consistent pastoral support which parish life may not be equipped to recognise, engage with, or support. This includes, but is not confined to, women who experience coercive control and domestic violence, new communities or ethnic minorities vilified and under attack, trafficked women, low appreciation for mothers and those raising children in the home, women trapped in socio-economic poverty, challenges to accessing education, full-time work, and equal pay.

The Why: This acknowledgement would normalise in the life of the Church a preferential option for women at the margins.

The How: Church communities would recognise both our need to learn respect for all, as well as our duty to serve (the work of *Trócaire* offers a good example). Partnering with agencies on the ground, including Church agencies but also embracing other agencies, so that we share and live from Catholic social teaching.

Pathway 4: The Church that Accompanies

“Jesus came up and walked by their side.”

(Luke 24:15)

Be a people that walks together and listens to each other

Introduction

In recent years the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) has become popular and used in various talks, retreats and gatherings across the Catholic Church in Ireland as in the preparatory theological document prepared by an Irish commission for the international Eucharistic Congress held in 2012 in Dublin. The story speaks of encounter, accompaniment, walking together, listening to each other and learning to discern God’s plans. The proposals in this pathway revolve specifically around renewed outreach and faith-inspiring and compassionate accompaniment of individuals and groups, with a particular focus on young people and on marriage and family.

In considering the following proposals, it is important to recognise the many forms of accompaniment that take place daily in Church life. Catholic parishes are points of gathering where people accompany one another in faith, hope and love. Apart from gathering to celebrate the sacraments, there are many occasions in parish life for meeting together such as choirs and concerts, charitable works, missions, novenas and parish events. The sick are visited regularly. There are various initiatives in favour of the less well off. Accompaniment of young parents takes place in some parishes in the form of baptismal teams. Ministry to the bereaved has always been a key element of the accompaniment that marks priestly ministry. It is growing today in the form of lay bereavement teams and funeral ministry teams in parishes.

Initiatives to do with greater collaboration between home, school and parish have emerged in many parishes in recent years. The best known is the *Do This In Memory* programme which invites children preparing for First Holy Communion and their parents into a closer relationship with the Sunday worshipping community. In some parishes, there is greater involvement of members of the parish in arranging the celebration of First Holy Communion and Confirmation. Reflecting this development, in 2018, the Council for Catechetics produced *Guidelines for Parish-Based Religious Education for Children*. There is a growing recognition of the need to accompany and support teachers. Some dioceses offer in-service days and occasional retreat moments for them.

With regard to young people themselves, mention must be made of the important place of Catholic schools and the accompanying role of school principals and teachers, religion teachers and chaplains. Some dioceses run simple initiatives to keep contact with children post-Confirmation. Transition year students in some dioceses take part in youth ministry and peer leadership programmes. Pilgrimages and retreats are often well-regarded experiences for young people during their school years. Some dioceses run liturgical music initiatives for young people.



The Irish Bishops' Council for Marriage and the Family assists the Bishops' Conference principally to respond to contemporary issues facing marriage and family life. It encourages and supports the spiritual and pastoral care of marriage and the family in parishes and dioceses. ACCORD is a well-established agency of the Irish Bishops' Conference supporting marriage and family life. While known mostly for its preparation courses for those preparing for the Sacrament of Marriage, it also offers accompanying support to husbands and wives, helping them to enrich their commitment to one another and to family life.

The Catholic Church in Ireland celebrated the World Meeting of Families in Dublin in 2018 with the theme: "The Gospel of the Family: Joy for the World." Pastoral toolkits and catechetical resources were prepared and distributed in advance of the event and promoted in parishes. The week-long global gathering featured a national opening, a three-day congress at the RDS, the Festival of Families at Croke Park, and a closing Mass celebrated by Pope Francis. The week featured keynote speakers, workshops, and youth programs. The theme of the domestic church was frequently highlighted.

Other accompanying experiences that can be noted in recent years include the *Beginning Experience* designed for people who have lost a spouse through death, separation, or divorce. Accompaniment of couples and families also takes place in the many Church movements, associations, and communities whose members minister to one another in the light of the Gospel and contribute enormously to the life of the Church in Ireland.

Proposal 1: Cultivating communities of accompaniment, discipleship and belonging



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that training for all forms of ministry must have an emphasis on pastoral accompaniment.

The What: The renewal of faith formation in Ireland calls not simply for new programmes, but for a culture of accompaniment where people can encounter Christ and grow together in faith.

The Why: To accompany not only those already engaged in parish and faith life, but also the many individuals and families who continue to approach the Church at significant moments of life's journey. To enable people to feel supported in their ongoing encounter with Christ.

The How: Accompaniment needs to be part of every process of formation in Ireland. Training in accompaniment skills needs to be resourced and skilled. For those already in existing ministries, ongoing formation in accompaniment skills need to be developed.

Proposal 2: A fundamental review of catechetical provision, sacramental preparation, and the Sacrament of Confirmation



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that the Church in Ireland conduct a fundamental review of catechetical provision in the context of preparation for the Sacraments, beginning with the Sacrament of Confirmation.

The What: To address the divorce between sacramental celebrations and ongoing faith practices for youth, especially those in recent receipt of Confirmation, arising from a consensus that the current model of sacramental preparation is not fulfilling the needs of young people. To invite parents and guardians of children preparing for Sacraments into a closer relationship with the Sunday worshipping community.

The Why: To create a genuine sense of home, school, and parish as collaborative partners in the journey towards receiving the sacraments. That young people receiving the sacraments might do so in a more informed, mature, and intentional way. That families, teachers and faith communities feel supported in their own faith journey and in their understanding of the sacraments. A deeper sense of belonging to the Christian faith community for young people who have received the sacrament of Confirmation.

The How: Beginning with the sacrament of Confirmation, an urgent review of the current practices and all models of sacramental preparation within the Church in Ireland to be undertaken. An immediate revised national process for catechesis and sacramental preparation. The development of a structured pathway of accompaniment for young people following the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Proposal 3: Nurturing the domestic church: home-based faith tools



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that the relevant agencies of the Irish Episcopal Conference develop a strategy for the provision of home-based faith tools.

The What: An invitation to families to accompany their children in faith at home, as the “domestic church”, through the use of simple digital and physical toolkits. To empower parents without making them feel overwhelmed. Also recognising grandparents and elders as a key existing support system.

The Why: To move from a “passive laity” to families who feel confident in their baptismal promises to nurture faith in the home.

The How: Provide a central digital hub which signposts to resources and activities specifically designed for domestic use. The development of a training programme for older parishioners to act as formal faith mentors to young families. Establish a simple, welcoming programme of follow-on gatherings for families in the period after the Baptism of their child, offering a series of gentle, invitational touchpoints where families can reconnect with the parish and their peers in a relaxed and supportive environment.

Proposal 4: The vocation of marriage

Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that dioceses develop a voluntary mentorship programme where experienced Catholic married couples are trained to walk with couples recently united in the Sacrament of Marriage, in their local parish or pastoral area.

The What: A pathway of accompaniment for couples – moving beyond only offering pre-marriage courses to also providing couple-to-couple support during the early years of marriage.

The Why: To provide a sustained sense of belonging for newly married couples, reducing isolation and strengthening the vocation to married life.

The How: Provision of a catechumenate model of marriage preparation. Invitation to couples intending to marry to avail of accompaniment. “Mentor couples” to be identified locally from among couples who are actively involved in parish life, or through *ACCORD*, or through some of the ecclesial movements and associations that minister to married couples and families. Liturgical celebrations to celebrate marriage and to mark significant wedding anniversaries.



Proposal 5: Family ministry team



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that dioceses establish a family ministry team at pastoral area level.

The What: The formation of a family ministry team to focus on pastoral accompaniment of families and on radical hospitality (i.e. the practice of welcoming others with an extraordinary, transformative generosity that completely exceeds expectations). A focus on building relationships as a point of entry to engagement with the parish.

The Why: To re-establish the parish as a relevant, supportive “hub” for the practical and spiritual challenges of modern family life. An understanding of the Church as a “field hospital” that offers help and healing to all, regardless of engagement or ability.

The How: Training and formation needed for all members of family ministry teams to ensure clear role definition and boundaries. The team organises liturgies and social events suited to families and to parish facilities. The team hosts a series of professional presentations to support families.

Proposal 6: Promotion of pastoral accompaniment and support of people who experience brokenness in relationships, in the spirit of *Amoris Laetitia*



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that the Church in Ireland promote the pastoral accompaniment of people who experience brokenness in relationships and engage with the universal Church in further discernment of this issue.

The What: *Amoris Laetitia* reaffirms the Church's understanding of marriage as a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman, open to life and rooted in the sacramental life of the Church. It also outlines how a person's objective situation and their personal culpability are not always the same. However, it calls on the Church to accompany individuals and families with mercy and compassion, especially those who experience brokenness in relationships.

The Why: To find a balance between fidelity to Church teaching and the Gospel call to mercy.

The How: By naming this issue again and engaging with it further, we emphasise its importance in the Church's pastoral life and mission in Ireland. To foster parish communities that are inclusive and welcoming where no one feels excluded from the love and care of the Church.

Proposal 7: Women and the domestic church



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that the Church in Ireland take steps to proactively validate, encourage, and support women engaged in the loving care of others in the domestic realm.

The What: Particular attention should be given to the domestic church where women continue to play an indispensable role as lifegivers, educators in faith, intergenerational carers, and sustainers of Christian households. The transmission of faith to future generations has depended largely on this often unseen but essential ecclesial labour.

The Why: A renewed pastoral emphasis on the domestic church would represent not a retreat from participation in wider ecclesial life, but a deeper articulation of the Church's own sense of mission and identity, while ensuring that women engaged in caring and faith-nurturing roles are themselves accompanied and supported.

The How: Initiate opportunities at parish and diocesan level to listen to and support women engaged in caring and faith-nurturing roles within the home, so that their experience can inform pastoral practice and appropriate forms of support. Develop accessible resources to support prayer and intergenerational faith-nurturing within the domestic church, while recognising that responsibility for the transmission of faith belongs to the whole Christian community and should not rest disproportionately on women. The relevant office of the Irish Episcopal Conference could support this work by gathering and sharing good practice and encouraging local initiatives.

Pathway 5: The Church that Empowers for Ministry and Co-Responsibility

“The particular manifestation of the Spirit granted to each one is to be used for the general good”

(1 Corinthians 12:7)

Be responsible together for the life of the Church

Introduction

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church throughout the world has been receiving the Council’s teaching on the co-responsibility of all the baptised for the life and mission of the Church. The Church in Ireland, through the Council for Evangelisation, Catechetics and Pastoral Renewal of the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference, seeks to embrace what this means for the life of the Church in Ireland.

Many dioceses and parishes have a Pastoral Council which advises the Bishop and Parish Priest on the pastoral life of the local Church. The pastoral council, through its status as a “participatory body”, is considered a privileged place where the baptised can act co-responsibly for the life and mission of the Church at local level. The conversion of these bodies from being merely advisory to fully co-responsible is now seen as a priority for the universal Church, as per the *Final Document* of the Synod on Synodality (§104) which called for pastoral councils to be mandated at diocesan and parish levels. These bodies, together with the presbyteral council or council of priests, are encouraged by the *Final Document* to build a synodal Church by their existence, efficiency, and vitality.

Integral to the notion of co-responsibility is the notion of service, or more accurately in a Church context, ministry. In the Church, co-responsibility is not oriented to sharing power but rather to serving together, in a differentiated manner that recognises the rights and duties of each member of the Church. Lay ministries in the Church can be “instituted” (i.e. formal ministries that are mandated by the competent Church authority for a particular purpose, conferred on members of the laity who have been formed for the ministry through a liturgical rite) or “non-instituted” (i.e. informal, temporary, deputed ministries for particular needs in the liturgical or pastoral life of a faith community).

There is a proliferation of ministries in the life of the Church in Ireland. Parishes and faith communities across the entire island are served by countless men and women, young people, and children who give of themselves generously as lay pastoral ministers, readers, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, cantors, choir members, stewards, youth leaders, counters, altar society members, altar servers, etc. Members of apostolic and charitable societies give generously of their time to serve the needs of others. Without the generosity and commitment of such people, the life and mission of the Church in Ireland would be impoverished beyond counting.

Nevertheless, the Synodal Pathway has identified a number of areas where growth and conversion are needed in the manner in which ministries are made available and coordinated. The full range of instituted ministries has not yet been fully embraced by the Church in Ireland. While many ministries exist to ensure parishes and faith communities continue to function, ministries that would give the Church added missionary impetus are sadly lacking. There is an emphasis on ministry “to”, i.e. to carry out certain functions; but a synodal Church that fosters the co-responsibility of all the baptised requires direction and formation for ministry “with”, i.e. ordained and laity ministering with each other.

In this pathway the proposals explore steps that might be taken so that all the baptised can be empowered to serve in a differentiated co-responsibility in a synodal-style Church.



Proposal 1: Cultural and structural renewal for a synodal Church



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends the creation of a permanent national ecclesial council

The What: In order to embed synodality within the structures, governance and decision-making processes of the Church in Ireland, a permanent national ecclesial council would be created by the Irish Episcopal Conference to reform and strengthen collaboration across bishops, clergy, religious and laity, to support the mandatory implementation of participatory bodies at parish and diocesan level, and the associated evaluation and accountability processes.

The Why: A more participatory and collaborative Church culture rooted in co-responsibility. Fostering the authentic participation of laity, religious, and clergy in pastoral discernment and decision-making together. Increased transparency, accountability and trust within Church governance. Stronger alignment between pastoral priorities and the lived experiences of local communities. Sustainable structures that support ongoing synodal renewal at parish, diocesan and national levels.

The How: At national level, a permanent national ecclesial council of lay women, men, religious and clergy, to gather regularly for prayer, discernment, consultation and pastoral planning.

A national governance reform to review and develop governance structures within the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference to strengthen participation, transparency, accountability and shared responsibility.

In line with the *Final Document* of the Synod on Synodality, to encourage dioceses to establish and maintain an active diocesan pastoral council, leadership team, and diocesan finance committee operating according to synodal principles.

At parish level, to require every parish to maintain an active parish pastoral council, leadership team, and parish finance committee that exercise genuine participation in discernment, pastoral planning, implementation and ongoing evaluation rather than functioning solely as consultative bodies.

Proposal 2: Formation of all (ordained and lay) for co-responsible ministry in a synodal Church



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that formation and ongoing formation of all the baptised, alongside and together with ongoing episcopal and priestly formation, should include the theory and practice of discernment, co-responsibility, and synodality.

The What: To establish comprehensive and ongoing formation, education and leadership development opportunities for all the baptised in support of a synodal and co-responsible Church. It aims to foster a shared culture of discipleship, discernment, team-based collaboration and mission by providing integrated formation pathways that respect the specific charism of each vocation, for lay people, clergy and religious.

The Why: A well-formed Church in which clergy, religious, and lay men and women are equipped to participate fully. Recognising Baptism as the primary sacrament that implies a call to serve. All the baptised to have access to various forms of ministry where their charisms are recognised, nourished and needed. That members of a local church community can identify with others in ministry who are “just like me”. Attracting people into ministry who are creative, visionary, and who exude enthusiasm and positivity towards ministry and the active faith life. Renewal of ordained ministry through formation that emphasises co-responsibility. Greater consistency and quality in pastoral leadership and planning.

The How: An expansion of the remit of current third level Catholic colleges, universities and seminaries and confirmation of their role in the formation and training of co-responsible leaders (lay and ordained) for ministry. Resourcing of new and current initiatives to build capacity for the formation and ongoing formation of lay and ordained for co-responsible ministry. Assisting all the baptised in discerning their charisms and calling them to assume co responsible roles in local faith communities. Establishing centres for theological, pastoral, educational and spiritual formation.

Proposal 3: Development of the ministry of Catechist, both instituted and commissioned, at every level



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends the appointment of dedicated catechists at diocesan and local faith-community levels, with a specific remit for accompaniment.

The What: The ministry of the Catechist offers a rich theological and ecclesial foundation. The role of the catechist is not simply to deliver content but to be a minister of accompaniment and missionary discipleship, someone called, formed, and missioned by the Church to walk with others in faith. Without national coordination and a strategic plan to support its implementation, even the best local efforts will remain fragmented and unevenly resourced.

The Why: Appointing dedicated catechists at regional and diocesan level, rooted in this ministry, who would resource and accompany teachers, parish catechists, chaplains, youth leaders, clergy, religious, bishops, and families. Offering an on-going invitation to people at all stages of life to grow in faith within their local communities of faith.

The How: Appoint a national director for formation for ministries to ensure that those emerging from programmes are formed for co-responsible ministry. Resourcing the work of catechesis and formation at all levels including national (national director for formation), Diocesan (instituted Catechist) and local (commissioned Catechist). A national structure and strategic plan to provide the coherence and direction needed.

Proposal 4: A national framework for co-responsibility and synodal ministry



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that a national directive on co-responsibility and synodal ministry be developed.

The What: A national overarching framework for co-responsibility, shared leadership and co-responsible ministry across the Church in Ireland to embed the principle that all the baptised share responsibility for the mission of the Church and to provide a coherent theological, pastoral and practical framework for implementing synodal ministry at parish, diocesan and national levels.

The Why: To offer a tangible framework resource that can help and guide implementation and encourage a stronger culture of co-responsibility rooted in Baptism and shared mission. Greater collaboration between clergy, religious and laity in leadership and ministry. More consistent implementation of synodal principles across dioceses and parishes. Enhanced capacity for pastoral planning, evangelisation and mission through team-based approaches. Increased confidence, formation and support for those engaged in leadership and ministry roles.

The How: At national level, a national directive on co-responsibility and synodal ministry to promote consistency across dioceses while allowing flexibility to respond to local circumstances, and to develop practical resources to support implementation.

At diocesan level, to encourage co-responsibility in governance, ministry formation and mission planning. At parish and pastoral area level, to promote co-responsible leadership models involving clergy and laity through parish leadership teams, regional pastoral partnerships, mission parishes and other forms of shared ministry.

Proposal 5: Support and recognition of lay ministry and co-responsible leadership for lay men and women



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends the development of sustainable structures to promote for lay women and lay men stable instituted ministries and other forms of lay ministry towards co-responsible leadership, governance, discernment, and decision-making

The What: To normalise women and men ministering publicly together in pastoral, liturgical, ecclesial, and other settings. To normalise inclusion through theological formation and pastoral practice and shared reflection on paragraph 60 of the *Final Document*. To identify, recognise, commission, institute where appropriate, and support lay ministry as an essential dimension of the Church's mission in Ireland, and to foster a culture in which the gifts, charisms and ministries of all the baptised are valued, encouraged and publicly affirmed.

The Why: Greater recognition and affirmation of lay ministry as an integral part of the Church's mission. Increased participation of lay women and men in pastoral, liturgical and leadership roles. Stronger support structures for those exercising ministry within parishes, dioceses and wider Church settings. Enhanced visibility of the contribution of women and men, religious and lay leaders in the life of the Church. Sustainable pathways for identifying, forming and supporting future generations of lay ministers and leaders.

The How: A national ecclesial council, together with the Irish Episcopal Council, a national office for women, and diocesan teams would develop a national process for the recognition, commissioning and support of lay ministry that provides theological grounding, pastoral guidance and practical pathways for implementation.

Promote the established stable instituted ministries of lector, acolyte and catechist, and encourage their wider implementation where appropriate.

Recognise and support ministries that respond to contemporary pastoral realities. Encourage dioceses and parishes to identify emerging ministries and provide pathways for their development and support.

Establish processes through which lay ministers are identified, encouraged, accompanied and supported throughout their ministry.

Explicitly affirm the contribution of women, men, religious and lay leaders in the mission of the Church. Encourage bishops, diocesan leadership teams and parish communities to publicly recognise and celebrate lay ministry through commissioning rites, diocesan gatherings and regular expressions of support and appreciation.

Explore sustainable funding models, employment frameworks and support structures for lay ministry and leadership roles where appropriate.

Proposal 6: Piloting co-responsible models for mission and pastoral leadership



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends the establishment of a piloting programme to develop, test, and evaluate new models of shared leadership, missionary outreach, and co-responsible pastoral practice.

The What: To encourage innovation, experimentation and adaptation in response to changing pastoral realities while remaining rooted in the Church's mission and synodal vision. The development and monitoring of pilot projects and innovative ministry models; the phased implementation of new pastoral initiatives and practices; and the establishment of structures for evaluation, accountability, and shared learning

The Why: Greater openness to innovation, experimentation and adaptation within the Church's pastoral mission. Development of effective models of co-responsible ministry. Stronger missionary outreach and engagement with contemporary society. Increased collaboration among parishes, dioceses, pastoral regions and national agencies. Evidence-based pastoral planning informed by evaluation and discernment accountability and shared learning. Added resources for pastoral leaders who will have a proven initiative to develop renewal of parish and diocesan life through initiatives that prioritise mission, participation and evangelisation.

The How: A national ecclesial council, together with the Irish Episcopal Conference and diocesan teams would establish a process for identifying, supporting (including financially), and evaluating innovative pastoral initiatives across Ireland.

Pilot initiatives that explore new forms of co-responsible Church life and ministry, from home and abroad.

Introduce reforms gradually through pilot programmes, consultation processes and local discernment, allowing flexibility in the implementation of new models while maintaining shared principles and objectives.

Establish regular reviews and evaluation processes for all pilot initiatives.

Ensure that all initiatives are oriented toward missionary discipleship, evangelisation and engagement with contemporary Irish society while being aware of the wider global context.

Proposal 7: Priority of adult faith formation



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends the establishment of a national office for life-long adult faith formation.

The What: To respond to the urgent need to prioritise adult faith formation at parish/faith community, diocesan and national levels, and to move beyond child-centred catechesis and sacramental preparation towards lifelong faith formation to support adults in connecting their faith with everyday life.

The Why: With greater access to faith formation, adults will develop a mature faith and have greater confidence in living their faith in the context of their daily lives and in sharing their faith with others.

The How: A dedicated and fully resourced national office to resource dioceses and local faith communities in delivering adult faith formation informed by the principles of OCIA.

Proposal 8: Canon law, ministry and the full exercise of baptismal mission for women (c.f. §60 of the Final Document of the Synod on Synodality)



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that the relevant office of the Irish Episcopal Conference conduct a national review in light of paragraph 60 of the *Final Document*.

By virtue of Baptism, women and men have equal dignity as members of the People of God. However, women continue to encounter obstacles in obtaining a fuller recognition of their charisms, vocation and place in all the various areas of the Church's life. This is to the detriment of serving the Church's shared mission.... This Assembly asks for full implementation of all the opportunities already provided for in Canon Law with regard to the role of women, particularly in those places where they remain underutilised. There is no reason or impediment that should prevent women from carrying out leadership roles in the Church: what comes from the Holy Spirit cannot be stopped. Additionally, the question of women's access to diaconal ministry remains open. This discernment needs to continue. The Assembly also asks that more attention be given to the language and images used in preaching, teaching, catechesis, and the drafting of official Church documents, giving more space to the contributions of female saints, theologians and mystics⁶.

The What: To identify and publish all areas where all the baptised, including women, are already called into ministry, to share their gifts and to lead.

The Why: To identify any patterns of exclusion where inclusion is already possible and helpful for all levels of church in Ireland.

The How: Following the review, a grassroots conversation to be initiated in every pastoral community (religious house, parish, agency, diocese etc) about paragraph 60 of the *Final Document* and its implications for the life of the local parish community.

6 Pope Francis and the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops
https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ENG-- Documento-finale.pdf
60

Proposal 9: Women's ministry and ordination to diaconate



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends that the Church in Ireland advocate for on-going exploration of women's ministry, including the diaconate.

The What: A voice for the full and equal inclusion of women in all areas of the life of the Church, including the ordained ministry, has been heard at all moments of the Synodal Pathway. This voice must be acknowledged, and its concerns must remain to the forefront of future discussions both within (i) every area of the Church in Ireland, and (ii) in Irish representation at the wider level of ecclesial discernment.

The Why: To ensure that the question of women's ministry, including ordination to the diaconate, remains actively within the Church's ongoing discernment and is not set aside, but is engaged with openly, seriously and in a theologically informed way. The Church in Ireland would provide opportunities for continued discussion and education, while bringing the concerns and hopes expressed throughout the Irish Synodal Pathway into the wider discernment of the universal Church. In this way, the Church in Ireland can both pursue fully what is already possible for women in ministry and continue to discern what may become possible.

The How: Bishops to use their role and influence to encourage discussion and education both nationally and internationally. Such advocacy needs to be theologically informed by current theology and ecclesiology, with particular emphasis on female theologians who have researched, reflected, and written on the history, tradition, and role of ordained ministry. Conversations about the ordination of women be considered in any discussion on the opening up of all ministry in general to women, so that as we open what is now possible, we are also continuing the conversation about what may be.

Proposal 10: Build clear leadership pathways: training, bursaries, and meaningful youth representation



Proposal:

This Assembly recommends the establishment of a national formation and training pathway for youth and young adult ministry within the Catholic Church in Ireland.

The What: The pathway is initially aimed at volunteers to build local capacity, and would equip both adult leaders and young people themselves to serve as missionary disciples, pastoral leaders, mentors, and facilitators of local youth ministry. The pathway would provide tiered formation at parish/partnership, diocesan, and national levels, combining:

- theology, prayer and spirituality rooted in *Christus Vivit*
- Practical ministry skills and safeguarding training
- Synodal leadership and accompaniment
- Peer ministry and evangelisation training

The Why: Creation of a national framework for youth ministry leadership and formation. Support sustainable parish/partnership and diocesan youth ministry teams. Equip young adults to become protagonists in the life of the Church. Foster a culture of accompaniment, belonging, and missionary discipleship. Support vocational discernment and leadership development. Build a national network of trained youth ministry leaders across Ireland.

The How: At parish/partnership level, local youth ministry teams to include clergy, parents, teachers, volunteers, and young adults.

At diocesan level, regional training hubs could provide accredited formation, safeguarding training, retreats, mentorship/reflective practice, and networking opportunities. Collaboration with schools, university chaplaincies, retreat centres, and Catholic movements to strengthen local capacity.

At national level, the Irish Episcopal Conference through the committee for Evangelisation and Youth Ministry (of the IEC council for Evangelisation, Catechesis and Pastoral Renewal) to coordinate a shared framework, online resources, leadership gatherings, accreditation standards, and partnerships with international Catholic youth ministry organisations.

Section 6

Appendix



Submission of the Working Group
on Belonging



Submission of the Working Group
on Women



Submission of the Working Group
on Co-Responsibility & Lay Ministry



Submission of the Working Group
on Youth



Submission of the Working Group
on Family



Submission of the Working Groups
on Healing



Submission of the Working Group
on Formation & Catechesis

National Synodal Team Members

Father Declan Hurley
(Chairperson)

Ms Patricia Carroll

Dr Gary Carville

Mr Paul Corcoran

Bishop Paul Dempsey

Father Eamonn Fitzgibbon

Ms Janet Forbes

Ms Crysta Gunn

Bishop Martin Hayes

Ms Julie Kavanagh

Bishop Brendan Leahy

Father Timothy Lehane

Sister Patricia Lynott

Mr Stephen McAnee

Rev Dermot McCarthy

Ms Julieann Moran

Sister Angèle Nkamsi

Dr Jessie Rogers

Bishop Michael Router



The Irish Synodal Pathway gratefully acknowledges the collaboration of the Irish Episcopal Conference and the Association of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI) in the preparation of the National Synodal Assembly.