

BAPTISED AND SENT

**Preparatory Document for the Pre-Synodal
Assembly of the Synodal Pathway of the
Catholic Church in Ireland being held in the
Kilkenny Convention Centre on Saturday,
18th October 2025**



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Adsumus Sancte Spiritus

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.

With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our hearts;

Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.

We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.

Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.

Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth
and what is right.

All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son, forever and
ever.

Amen.

Seasaimid i Do láthairse, a Spioraid Naoimh,
agus muid ag teacht le chéile i D'ainm

Agus Tusa amháin mar threoraí againn

socraigh Tú féin síos inár gcroíthe;

Múin dúinn an tslí a chaithfimid dul
agus conas is féidir linn leanúint di.

Táimid lag agus claonta chun peaca;
ná lig dúinn ainriail a chur chun cinn.

Ná lig don aineolas sinn a chur amú,

ná don chlaonpháirtíocht ár ngníomhartha a mhúnlú.

Lig dúinn teacht Ort inár n-aontacht
chun go dtriallfaimid le chéile chun na beatha síoraí
gan dul ar strae ó bhealach na fírinne ná ón cheart.

Iarraimid é seo uile Ort,

Tusa a bhíonn ag obair de shíor agus i ngach uile áit,
i gcomaoin an Athar agus an Mhic,
trí shaol na saol.

Amen.



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Message of Welcome

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

When we began this synodal journey in 2021, we set ourselves a simple yet profound question: What does God want from the Church in Ireland at this time? Through prayer, listening, and conversation in the Spirit, a picture has been emerging. At the heart of what we are discerning is the rediscovery of our baptismal calling. Baptism is the foundation of our dignity, the source of our unity, and the wellspring of our mission. It is through baptism that women and men, young and old, lay and ordained, are called to discipleship, which includes sharing responsibility for the life and witness of the Church. Seen through this lens, all that we have heard finds its coherence – the longing for welcome, the hunger for formation, the call to healing, the urgency of inclusion.

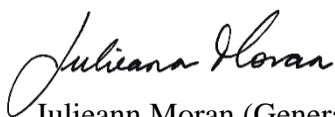
The voices we have listened to speak with both honesty and hope. We have heard a deep desire for belonging, especially among those who feel excluded or judged. We have heard the call to support families and young people, to empower women and lay people in leadership, to renew our liturgy, and to strengthen faith formation so that our communities may radiate the joy of the Gospel. Alongside these hopes, we have heard the pain of those wounded by the Church and the cry for accountability, reconciliation, and healing. We have also encountered tensions between invitation and expectation, tradition and renewal, continuity and change. These differences need not divide us but can draw us deeper into discernment so a harmonious consensus may emerge.

The priorities that have surfaced (and shared in this preparatory document for our Pre-Synodal Assembly in Kilkenny) should not be seen as isolated tasks but as dimensions of one baptismal vocation. Together they point towards a Church that God is calling us to be; a Church of welcome and belonging, rooted in baptism, alive in mission, and open to the future that the Holy Spirit is preparing. This preparatory document gathers these insights and offers them for reflection and discernment. It is not a finished or final word but a step along the way, a sign that the Spirit is at work in our midst.

We pause in gratitude for the witness of Pope Francis, whose prophetic call to synodality has shaped and inspired our journey. His life and teaching remind us that the Church is most alive when it listens, accompanies, and embraces with compassion. As we give thanks for his legacy, we also look with hope to Pope Leo XIV, whose emphasis on peace, urging us to build bridges, live in dialogue, and embrace a “disarming peace” resonates deeply with our calling today. We also acknowledge with gratitude the Irish bishops, whose vision and courage in setting out on this synodal pathway have opened new possibilities for renewal and hope.

As we continue to walk this path together, may we be guided by Jesus Christ who calls us to be his people, strengthened by the Holy Spirit who leads us in truth, and may we be drawn ever closer to God our Father, source of all life and love.

With every blessing,



Julieann Moran (General Secretary of the Irish Synodal Pathway)



The Purpose and Process of this Assembly

The National Synodal Team looks forward to welcoming you to the Pre-Synodal Assembly in the Kilkenny Convention Centre on Saturday, 18th October. This gathering builds on the Spring Gatherings (February-May 2025), when communities across Ireland came together to consider how the Holy Spirit is speaking through the emerging proposals and themes and identify priorities for action. The reflections and priorities gathered were prayerfully considered by the National Synodal Team, listening for the Spirit's guidance. From that discernment, a picture has emerged of both the hopes and tensions shaping our life as Church, and the directions where the Spirit is calling us.

Now, in Kilkenny, we take the next step by coming together nationally to deepen that listening and begin shaping concrete pathways for renewal. This is a moment to move from shared reflection to decisions for action and mission, rooted in our baptismal calling and guided by the Spirit. Its purpose is to share the fruits of our listening, to discern the priorities being placed before us, and to prepare the ground for the National Synodal Assembly in 2026. This is why this gathering is called a *pre-synodal assembly*. As delegates, you are asked to carry the voices of your communities, to listen deeply to one another in the Spirit, and to confirm whether these emerging priorities reflect what God is asking of us. It is also a space to name differences honestly and hold them in faith, trusting that harmony can emerge amidst diversity. In this way, the assembly will help shape the agenda and direction of the National Synodal Assembly, ensuring it is firmly rooted in the lived faith and experience of the People of God.

The day has been designed around prayer, listening, and dialogue. We will work in mixed roundtables, intermingled across dioceses and groups, so that the richness of experience and perspective can be shared. Central to our work will be Conversation in the Spirit – a way of listening and speaking that honours both the diversity of our experiences and the unity of our baptismal calling. This day is one step along a wider journey: a journey of renewal rooted in our baptism and sustained by the Spirit. Our aim is not to produce a single statement or vision, but to deepen our understanding together and to feed into preparation for the National Synodal Assembly in 2026. This is a process of dialogue and discernment, not debate, shaped by servant leadership where each voice is valued. Together, we seek to listen, to discern, and to walk forward in communion, participation, and mission.

Draft Timetable for the Day (please note: times and details may be adjusted as needed)

8.30 a.m.	Registration and Tea/Coffee on Arrival
10.00 a.m.	Opening Prayer & Welcome
10.30 a.m.	Presentation: What has Emerged from the National Process so far
11.00 a.m.	Break
11.30 a.m.	Conversation in the Spirit
1.15 p.m.	Lunch
2.45 p.m.	Reaching Consensus on the Main Points from the Morning
4.30 p.m.	Looking Ahead to the First National Synodal Assembly 2026
5.00 p.m.	Summary & Prayer

From Feedback to Discernment

Gathering in Dalgan Park

1. The National Synodal Team gathered in Dalgan Park on 15th and 16th May to reflect on the feedback which had been received from dioceses and groups following the 2025 Spring Gatherings where themes from Ireland's contribution to the universal synodal process had been considered. Just as the Spring Gatherings were synodal events applying Conversation in the Spirit as a means of arriving at an authentic expression of collective views through careful and prayerful listening, so too the National Team gathered for prayerful reflection and spiritual conversation.
2. Before arriving in Dalgan Park, the members of the Team had the opportunity to read the submissions received from the dioceses, religious congregations, movements and associations with each member focusing in particular on specific submissions. The goal of the Team was not to prepare a quantitative analysis of points made in the submissions, but rather to discern what the Spirit was inviting the Team to recognise as most important for communion, participation and mission in the submissions, which had been so carefully prepared.

Themes from the Spring Gatherings (February-May 2025)

3. Across the dioceses and groups, feedback demonstrated that all seventeen of the themes which had been identified during the universal synodal process in Ireland (2021-2024) had received careful consideration: Baptism, Catechesis, Education, Faith Formation, Youth, Liturgy, Women, Clergy, Lay Ministry, Co-Responsibility, Abuse, Sexuality & LGBTQ+ Issues, Culture Belonging, Family, Ecumenism, and Covid-19.
4. Each had been recognised at the Spring Gatherings as important in the context of developing synodality in the Church. All were seen as dimensions of the holistic nature of synodal renewal. The submissions described how the Spring Gatherings had come to identify themes which they regarded as being of particular importance through the process of Conversation in the Spirit. They also explained the connectedness between different clusters of themes as they emerged, some by reference to capacity for mission and others as the focus of mission.

Noting the Points of Divergence and Different Approaches

5. The feedback also identified points of divergence which had also arisen. Not all responses reported such divergences however. Some of the groups offered their feedback from the perspective of the focus or charism that animates their group. In the case of the dioceses and other groups, participants were drawn from a range of experiences, perspectives and roles out of which divergences were more likely to arise and which were faithfully reflected in the feedback. In many cases, these were reported as differences of emphasis rather than divergent perspectives, but the Team paid particular attention to the latter.

6. In reflecting on the themes where strong alignment was reported and on those identified as priorities, the Team recognised that different approaches had been taken in the Spring Gatherings. Some of the differences that emerged were shaped by how language was used. The same words carried different meanings for different groups, which affected how people understood what was being asked of them. Themes were identified as important in some cases because of their intrinsic significance in the life of faith, others for reasons connected to the sustainability of faith communities, and yet others for the urgency of particular pastoral challenges or in light of the experience of the synodal journey to date. Other differences arose from the distinction between ends and means: while many agreed on the desired outcomes, there was less agreement on the resources or methods available to achieve them. While in others, the urgency of addressing particular mission goals shaped the reported priorities.
7. The National Synodal Team concluded that no simple process of collecting and summarising could produce a useful synthesis of the feedback which had been received. Rather, what was required was to discern in the Spirit an interpretive pattern of responses which could nourish those engaged in the process of synodal renewal, both in the varying circumstances of each local church community and in the shared task of discerning what the Lord is asking of His Church in Ireland.

The Shared Core Mission

8. The Team agreed that at a profound level, what united the responses was the evident passion for enabling people to form *“a life-affirming relationship with God and with each other.”* This core mission was universally seen to require the witness of vibrant communities of faith which embody a spirit of discipleship through deepening the faith of their members and fostering a culture of co-responsibility for proclaiming the Risen Christ through invitation, accompaniment and welcome. The reality that these communities of faith must pursue their mission in the context of *“a crisis of faith and of the ability to communicate faith”* was acknowledged across all the feedback received.



Themes Emerging from the Spring Gatherings

9. What follows is not a statistical summary, but a synthesis of the submissions received from the Spring Gatherings, offering a faithful account of the hopes, concerns and priorities voiced by the People of God, the *Pobal Dé*, in Ireland. Throughout this synthesis we have included direct quotations from the submissions received – these direct quotations, where they appear, have been italicised. As with previous syntheses prepared by the Irish Synodal Pathway, the themes and priorities have been listed in alphabetical order.

The Most Dominant Themes: *What People Talked About Most*

Baptism as the Foundation of Identity and Mission

10. Baptism was repeatedly cited as a reminder that every member of the Church has a value and role. *“There is growing concern that the importance of Baptism is being overlooked. We must rediscover and deepen our understanding of our baptismal calling.”* This vision of Church identity, anchored in baptism, was seen as foundational for dignity, mission, and inclusion. *“Baptism is clearly seen as the number one priority. It is an entry point to a life of faith, a gateway to mission, and the root and foundation on which to build a Christian life.”* Another submission affirmed that *“Baptism is the foundation of our faith-life and calls us to share our gifts within the Church, that is: laity and clergy sharing responsibility.”* A greater understanding of baptism was sought to support participation in ministry, inclusion of the so-called marginalised, and to recall the Church’s identity as the Body of Christ where all are equal in dignity and called to holiness. Some named it as the Sacrament of Initiation that *“welcomes us into the family of Christ”* and *“opens the pathway to living a Christian life and serving the Church, whether as ordained ministers or as lay people.”* Renewing this baptismal awareness was seen as essential to revitalising parish life and ensuring that *“shared responsibility within the Church should emerge naturally”* from this common foundation.

Belonging and Inclusion at the Heart of Community

11. Belonging and inclusion appeared in nearly every conversation. The Church is perceived as struggling to welcome those on the margins, especially young people, migrants, LGBTQ+ persons, non-traditional families, those who have experienced relationship breakdown, those in second unions, those who feel judged or hurt, and those estranged from faith communities. There is a deep desire for a listening Church that makes space for the wounded, those who are doubting, and those who feel on the margins. *“Belonging brings caring, mercy, compassion and love. It is at the heart of who we are and builds community that belongs to Christ and is mutually beneficial to us all.”* Participants stressed that *“a sense of belonging is fundamental for individuals within the Church community, linking it to family, education, and participation in faith.”* Some highlighted isolation, loneliness, and anxiety, and the marginalisation of many individuals and groups. Others insisted that welcome and inclusion must be more than an ideal, *“embracing everyone, especially those who may feel marginalised, the LGBTQ + community, people with disabilities or those who feel disconnected from the Church.”* Belonging was described as an emotional need and a Gospel

imperative linked to mission and evangelisation. As one contribution put it, *“it helps people to take responsibility, links to engagement and active membership, and is key to people being open to a journey of faith.”*

Co-Responsibility and Shared Leadership

12. At the heart of the synodal conversations lay the continued call for co-responsibility; a vision of Church in which all the baptised share in leadership, mission, and ministry. *“Shared responsibility is vital for the future of our Church. While it needs careful and gentle guidance, it is not optional and must progress steadily.”* Repeatedly named as key to the Church’s future, co-responsibility and collaboration were seen as *“key to growing and maturing in faith, and...deemed necessary.”* Many stressed that it is *“the only route to sustainability and needs to be addressed more fully by the Church authorities.”* This theme was consistently linked to lay ministry, baptism, clericalism, and leadership reform. As one submission noted, *“the number of clergy is declining and consequently the future of the Church will require increased lay involvement.”* Participants emphasised that the Church must not depend on priests alone; that *“both laity and clergy are needed,”* and that *“for this to be meaningful, clergy must be willing to share responsibility, and the laity must be prepared to accept responsibility.”* Only in this way, they said, *“can there be true ownership of the Church by all its members, allowing the Kingdom of God to flourish more fully.”* Calls for shared responsibility were matched by recognition that laity must feel empowered and supported, with investment needed in faith formation and training for all – clergy and laity.

Faith Formation, Catechesis and Religious Education

13. Faith formation, catechesis, and religious education emerged as another pressing theme, revealing a hunger for deeper understanding of the faith and authentic living of the Gospel. Participants emphasised adult faith formation for all, as well as innovative youth catechesis rooted in lived discipleship. Schools, parishes, and families were all seen as crucial contexts though some tension existed regarding their respective roles. Formation was seen as foundational for renewing the Church. *“Faith formation brings us into personal contact with Jesus and is essential because the Church is the community of faith.”* Many stressed it must be ongoing to nourish the faithful at all stages and that *“faith formation is a top priority because it is foundational for enabling people to share their faith with joy.”* Others noted that *“faith formation was...a key element in preventing disengagement from the Church”* and that *“unless there is faith formation, all other aspects cannot be addressed.”* There was a strong call for formation equipping people for public witness, *“vital to adult confidence in talking about their faith in public.”* Several pointed to the importance of teaching, calling *“for improved education, particularly for teachers, to ensure effective faith formation”* and that *“better-trained educators can empower parishioners with a clearer understanding of their beliefs.”*

Family as the Seedbed of Faith

14. Concern for young people was echoed in reflections on the family as the primary context for faith transmission and as a pastoral space needing greater support. Families were seen as the key place where faith is passed on, with many emphasising the need for support in raising children in the faith. *“Families were identified as the first educators of the faith, yet many feel unequipped or*

unsupported.” Family life was closely connected to baptism, formation, and belonging. Some called for stronger parish-school connections, insisting that *“a greater emphasis needs to be placed on nourishing and supporting the faith in families, and in our schools.”* Several submissions linked family vitality to the Church’s vitality, warning that *“without supporting families... the future vitality of the Church”* would be at risk. Calls were made for resources, pastoral accompaniment, and parish structures prioritising diverse families. As one group observed, *“Family is at the heart of community, and its support is essential to sustaining the Church’s mission.”*

Lay Ministry is Essential for Parish Life

15. Co-responsibility was closely linked with lay ministry, particularly the need for meaningful training, support, and recognition of lay leaders, especially women and young adults. Lay ministry was recognised as essential, not only because of the declining number of clergy, but also to meet parish needs and to provide lay men and women with the opportunity to live out their baptismal call to mission and ministry. *“The active role of the laity in ministry is vital for parish life,”* one comment affirmed, while another called for *“training and commissioning lay ministers to serve in pastoral care, catechesis, and liturgy.”* One group stating plainly, *“lay people should be more involved in the decision-making of the Church”* and another, *“We need more lay-led services, especially in rural areas where priests are few.”* Expansion of lay ministry was also seen as a corrective to clericalism, noting that *“clericalism is a barrier to the gifts of the laity being recognised and used,”* and that *“greater humility and openness from clergy”* is needed so that lay and ordained may truly work together in service of the Gospel.

Liturgy and Worship Renewal

16. People care deeply about the Mass and worship, but many felt liturgy needs to be more engaging, accessible, and beautiful. Calls for renewal were frequent, especially to help young people and newcomers feel connected: *“Renewing our liturgy also featured prominently with comment on language, participation, involvement, singing and somehow connecting liturgy and the Word to life.”* Liturgy was affirmed as central but often experienced as stale or disengaging, particularly for younger generations. Some expressed that *“liturgy is important to everyone, but some people find it uninspiring and in need of renewal.”* Others stressed *“the need for more inclusive language, participation, and a sense of belonging through worship.”* Concerns included that *“liturgical language and symbolism are often inaccessible or outdated, particularly for young people and those unfamiliar with Church traditions.”* Several called to *“review how liturgy is celebrated to ensure it supports participation, community, and mission.”* Renewal was linked with lay participation: *“people expressed a desire for more active involvement in liturgy, especially in music and lay ministries.”* The underlying hope was for worship that is beautiful, relevant, and capable of drawing people into deeper communion.

Sexuality and LGBTQ+ Inclusion

17. Many felt the Church needs to do more to welcome and respect LGBTQ+ people. There was a desire for open, honest conversation, grounded in the dignity of every person and shared baptismal identity, reflecting a growing awareness of how the Church speaks and acts in these areas shapes

its credibility. Calls for compassion, dignity, and pastoral care were persistent, though often entangled with tension. Some stressed the importance of belonging for LGBTQ+ persons, noting *“discussions on sexuality revealed discomfort among some, but also a desire among others for the Church to be more compassionate and to listen to personal stories.”* Debate existed over emphasis and approach, with feedback noting that *“on LGBTQ+ inclusion, some feared that categorisation increases marginalisation, while others called for explicit outreach.”*

Women’s Participation and Leadership

18. Women’s participation in ministry and leadership drew strong support and frustration over slow progress. Many saw this as a matter of justice and credibility rooted in baptismal dignity and co-responsibility. *“Women - despite being central to the mission of Jesus, women’s role in the Church is diminished compared to their male counterparts - there is a need for equality, diversity and an increase in leadership roles for women.”* There was a strong and repeated call for women to be more fully included at every level of Church life. Some voiced, *“progress [is] needed on equality. There was a strong expressed view by women and men that women do not have equal dignity in the Church,”* and others affirmed that *“the role of women in Church, and in society, needs to be looked at in relation to co-responsibility and ministry, and with particular emphasis on the use of inclusive language.”* It was noted that the subject of women keeps coming up. *“This recurrence was felt to be action of the Holy Spirit.”* Women’s voices in decision-making were highlighted as essential: *it is critical that women make and are seen to make decisions at the highest level*” and that *“women need to be consulted by professional researchers to establish their attitudes to the Church.”*

Young People and the Future of the Church

19. In the context of belonging and inclusion, concern for young people was pronounced. Many highlighted the sharp decline in youth engagement. Strong calls emerged for creative outreach and meaningful involvement in liturgies, mission, and leadership. *“Young people specifically express a desire to belong, to have a home.”* Feedback repeatedly affirmed that *“youth are the future of our Church”* and that *“youth should be a special mission of the Church.”* Their absence was seen as an urgent challenge, with concerns for young men *“educated by social media”* and vulnerable to suicide. Youth engagement was not just about attendance but about listening to their experiences and creating opportunities for meaningful leadership. The call was for a Church where young people are active participants shaping its life and mission.

Other Themes Noted

20. Several other themes arose though they were less dominant in the overall conversations: Abuse, Care for Creation and Social Justice, Clergy, and Evangelisation and Mission. The theme of abuse was named as an ongoing wound, with participants calling for continued accountability and transparency, urging that *“healing must remain a priority for those affected by abuse.”* Another gathering stressed that *“the Church must acknowledge past wrongs openly and continue to create safe spaces for victims and survivors to be heard.”* Care for creation and social justice were mentioned but seen as underrepresented, with some expressing disappointment that *“Laudato Si’ and the call to ecological conversion were barely mentioned,”* urging the Church to integrate

these concerns more fully into parish life. There was concern about declining numbers of clergy and the need for pastoral support, with one comment noting, *“The number of priests is falling and many are overworked; they need support and encouragement from the laity,”* while another observed, *“we need to care for the wellbeing of our clergy as they carry heavy burdens.”* Evangelisation and mission were also discussed, with a desire for renewed outreach to seekers and the religiously unaffiliated. As one group put it, *“We need to go out to the peripheries, not just wait for people to come to us,”* while another stated, *“Mission means meeting people where they are and sharing the joy of the Gospel.”*

Diverging Themes: Points of Tension and Differing Perspectives

21. Even as consensus emerged on many fronts, inherent divergences also remained. The next section highlights areas where convictions clashed and where reform was both demanded and resisted.

Abuse and Accountability

22. The issue of abuse revealed tension. While many saw the need for open acknowledgment and repentance as essential to healing and credibility, others avoided the topic entirely: *“In some cases, the topic of abuse was avoided, with little or no mention during group discussions.”* Another noted that *“some participants appeared reluctant to engage on the issue, moving the conversation on to other topics.”* Among those addressing it, there was insistence that healing remain a priority, and the Church must take responsibility for past wrongs: *“Several groups also named the ongoing impact of abuse and the need for the Church to be proactive in addressing all forms of abuse, including bullying and elder abuse, as part of its pastoral and healing mission.”* Some submissions stressed *“continued accountability and transparency in safeguarding”* as an ongoing, non-negotiable responsibility.

Sexuality and LGBTQ+ Inclusion

23. For some, current language and attitudes were experienced as hurtful and exclusionary, with calls for reform and compassion; for others, they represented doctrinal integrity. Some participants, particularly younger people, *“spoke of alienating language and exclusion, while others were more cautious or chose not to comment.”* Strong feelings and differences in opinion remain: *“In relation to Sexuality and LGBTQI+...this was primarily seen as part of the wider themes of belonging, family or community while one group felt that LGBTQ+ issues had been emphasized too much in schools and the wider culture.”* Submissions stressed belonging in conjunction with the theme of LGBTQ+ persons, especially in light of the Church’s need to be more welcoming to all. There were also concerns about clarity in teaching and pastoral approach: *“More clarity for laity is needed on the Church stance on LGBTQ/sexuality.* In some groups, there was debate over emphasis and approach. Others expressed the view that *“the Church needs to be more open and less judgemental in its language on these matters.”*

Women's Participation and Ministry

24. While many called for greater inclusion, decision-making roles, and ordination to the diaconate or priesthood, others voiced discomfort or offered alternative solutions: *"Many voiced a strong opinion on the need for women in ministry while others, a small but vocal minority, insisted that the best way forward was a male diaconate and foreign priests, however the differences in culture was cited as a major obstacle."* Views ranged from acceptance of the current exclusion, while requesting clear explanations: *"Some expressed acceptance of the exclusion of women to ordination while asking that people be told why this is so,"* to calls for greater inclusion: *"On the role of women, strong support for expanded participation (including diaconate) coexisted with some expressing a view that current roles were sufficient."* Some saw the persistence of the theme as a step forward, others criticised its continued resurfacing as inadequate or patronising. Divergences were often tied to theological interpretations, cultural differences, and the pace of change. Others linked the discussion to trust and transparency, noting *"lack of trust was also partly present in relation to women and the absence of reference to ordination to the diaconate... Building and respecting the role of women, including their ordination to the diaconate, was strongly articulated by some."*

Other Noted Points of Tension

25. With clericalism and co-responsibility, tensions arose in practice. Participants observed that *"while many clergy spoke positively about co-responsibility, others expressed reservations or concerns, leading to little practical change in some parishes."* Lay participants saw *"shared leadership as essential for the Church's future"* but felt that *"clergy must be willing to share responsibility, and the laity must be prepared to accept responsibility"* for it to become a reality. For faith formation and education, differences arose regarding the role of schools vis-à-vis parishes and families. Some suggested *"removing sacramental preparation from schools entirely so that parents and parishes take full responsibility,"* while others preferred *"a shared approach between school, parish, and home."* These reflected generational and philosophical divides, with some favouring *"experiential and relational faith formation"* and others emphasising *"a structured, doctrinal approach to teaching the faith."* Divergence with liturgy emerged around style, language, and relevance. Some advocated for change, calling for *"more inclusive language, participation, and a sense of belonging through worship,"* while others cautioned against altering established forms, warning that *"rigidity is not helpful, but neither is change for its own sake."* Visions differed between adaptability to connect with modern life and emphasising stability and tradition. In terms of youth engagement, younger participants *"spoke of the Church being out of touch or irrelevant, and of feeling excluded and lacking a voice,"* while older contributors *"expressed sadness at the absence of young people from Mass and other sacraments."* Views diverged on youth ministry, from *"innovative outreach and leadership opportunities for young people in liturgy, mission, and parish life,"* to *"bringing young people back to the sacraments and traditional practices."* In contrast, a youth movement offered a counter-perspective, *"Young people are not disinterested in faith; they are searching for authenticity, truth, and community. We see the answer in a return to the beauty of the sacraments, Eucharistic adoration, and a strong devotional life."*

26. Importantly, these divergences were not always outright opposition but reflected differences in emphasis, language, or experience. Yet they reveal that the Church in Ireland stands at a crossroads, not just between past and future, but between competing visions of what it means to be Church today. Despite divergences, common ground was discerned in the following Spirit-led priorities.

Emerging Priorities in the Submissions: *Where the Spirit May Be Leading Us*

27. Certain priorities emerged that participants repeatedly described as Spirit-prompted signposts for the journey ahead. These were not simply popular ideas but were spoken of with urgency, conviction, and as the communal discernment of God's will.

Baptism as a Foundational Priority

28. Baptism was named a foundational priority, described as “*an entry point to a life of faith, a gateway to mission, and the root and foundation on which to build a Christian life.*” Participants stressed that its meaning must be recovered not just as a rite of passage but as a lifelong vocation. Baptism was described as the wellspring of Christian life, reminding the Church that all the baptised, lay and ordained alike, are called to contribute their gifts in shared responsibility for its mission. This vocational understanding was linked directly to dignity, equality, and participation for all, regardless of gender or role.

Belonging as a Core Desire

29. Belonging surfaced as a core integrating priority. More than a theme, it reflected the core desire of the People of God. A longing for a Church not merely correct but connected; not just doctrinal but relational, “*a home for all, not just for some.*” It encompassed welcome, inclusion, safety, and healing, especially for LGBTQ+ persons, migrants, women, people with disabilities, and those hurt by the Church. Participants paired belonging with youth, welcome, and community, underscoring its role as the thread tying together multiple strands of renewal.

Co-Responsibility and Lay Ministry

30. There was strong support for co-responsibility as a structural and cultural shift. Lay people – women and men – expressed a desire “*to be empowered, not just consulted*” tied directly again to baptismal identity: “*All are anointed as priest, prophet, and king.*” Participants stressed that new leadership models, parish support structures, and inclusive decision-making are needed for this to be realised in practice.

Faith Formation and Catechesis for All

31. Deepening faith formation was described as essential to move “*from inherited faith to intentional discipleship.*” Catechesis should be anchored in “*authentic, lived faith, not just doctrine,*” and ensure both laity and clergy are well-formed for ministry. Several groups linked adult catechesis, teacher training, and lay formation directly to mission, evangelisation, and meaningful liturgy.

Family – Supporting Families as the Domestic Church

32. Families were recognised as *“the first educator of the faith,”* the seedbed of belonging.

Participants called for stronger pastoral support for families, children, and intergenerational ministry, urging a shift from institutional rigidity toward *“nourishing and supporting the faith in families, and in our schools.”* The domestic Church was seen as central to sustaining faith in an increasingly secular context.

Liturgy That Connects Word and Life

33. Liturgy was described as a vital point of connection between daily life and spiritual meaning.

Some emphasised *“language, music, and ritual that resonate with people’s lives today,”* while maintaining a sense of tradition. Many called for participatory, inclusive, and inspiring liturgy especially for youth and newcomers. One submission summarised: *“Renewing our Liturgy means connecting the Word to life.”*

Women’s Gifts Recognised and Utilised

34. The role of women continues to demand resolution, not merely for structural reform but as a matter of justice, belonging, and credibility. Exclusion of women from decision-making and visible leadership contradicts the baptismal dignity the Church proclaims. Participants argued that *“the gifts of women must be fully recognised and utilised at every level of Church life.”* Others stated that *“building and respecting the role of women, including their ordination to the diaconate, was strongly articulated by some.”*

Young People at the Heart of Mission

35. Youth engagement was repeatedly named as critical. Young participants stated they are *“not disinterested in faith; they are searching for authenticity, truth, and community.”* Calls for ministries included empowering young leaders, bridging generational gaps, and connecting spiritual formation with social and ecological justice. One submission warned, *“If we do not engage young people meaningfully now, we risk losing an entire generation.”*

Seeds of the Spirit (Prophetic Undercurrents)

36. Finally, quieter yet persistent undercurrents suggest that the Holy Spirit is also stirring the Church to engage with themes that, while not dominant, carry prophetic weight for the future:

Communication / Language, Ecological and Social Justice, Healing, Unity and Outreach. Renewal in communication was highlighted. As one submission put it, *“Better communication is needed – language that is accessible, stories that connect, and outreach that builds bridges rather than walls.”* This was seen as central to rebuilding trust and engaging those distant from the Church. Ecological and Social Justice were identified as underrepresented but vital. Some voiced disappointment that *“Laudato Si’ and the call to ecological conversion were barely mentioned,”* highlighting a gap between teaching and lived priorities. Others urged action on poverty and intergenerational justice, bringing faith into dialogue with pressing social realities.

37. Participants stressed that healing must remain a priority, particularly regarding abuse. The theme was recognised as significant, *“with calls for the Church to take a strong stance against it and*

prioritise the wellbeing of its members.” Safe spaces for survivors were emphasised. It was noted, *“The pain of abuse and exclusion continues to cast a long shadow over the Church’s mission. Participants believe that the Catholic Church in Ireland must embody a renewed vision grounded in faith, inclusion, courage, and hope.”* Continued accountability and transparency were seen as non-negotiable, with trust rebuilt only through *“acknowledgement of hurt and the pain caused.”* There was a call for unity and outreach, for mission to the disconnected – including a recognition of Ireland’s long history of missionary engagement, for ecumenism and dialogue with other religions, and cultural sensitivity in an increasingly diverse society. Participants expressed that desire for an *“outward-facing Church rooted in unity, encounter, and service to those on the margins.”* That *“dialogue must be the Church’s posture, across denominations, generations, and cultures.”* These quieter voices may prove prophetic, pointing the Church in Ireland toward healing, justice, and mission in the years ahead.

Some Reflective Questions

What is staying with you from your reading?

What quotes strike you most and why?

What is emerging for you?

Discerning God's Call in the Midst of Tension

38. The submissions from the Spring Gatherings to the Irish Synodal Pathway reveals a Church in motion; a community grappling with its identity, grieving its wounds, and reaching for new life. What emerges is not a tidy consensus, but a Spirit-led ferment. In the cries for belonging, the tensions over inclusion, and the hopes for deeper formation and shared mission, the task before the National Synodal Team was not only to listen but to respond.

Listening to Divergence, Frustration and Fatigue

39. In its process of further communal discernment, the National Synodal Team paid particular attention to the areas of divergence which were identified in the submissions. As the synthesis report indicates, a pattern was discerned. The Team could see that the role of women in the Church and the response to be made to voices which had been heard during the synodal process advocating for equality, including access to ordination, was identified by some as a pressing issue; others regarded it as a potential distraction from more immediate opportunities for renewal. There were those who felt that engagement with contemporary society, especially young people, required recognition of the reality of changed attitudes to sexuality and sexual identity, while others emphasised the importance of maintaining the integrity of authentic church teaching in these areas.

40. Significant divergences were also reported with regard to the legacy of abuse in the Church. For some, a failure to acknowledge fully the suffering of victims and survivors and "*to own our broken past*" as a precondition for renewal would contradict and undermine the life-affirming message of the Gospel; for others, while acknowledging the need for accountability and vigilance, there was a perceived risk of distracting from other tasks of renewal and mission.

41. There was frustration that liturgical forms and language constituted a barrier to engagement and participation, while others expressed the view that the integrity and beauty of the liturgy should be valued in their own right and for their capacity to attract and engage. For some, the role of schools in faith formation and sacramental preparation was seen as invaluable and a core responsibility of schools under Catholic patronage. For others, the problematic nature of current practice, with wide variations in capacity and performance, pointed to a need for greater responsibility on parish communities in support of parents in this regard.

42. The disappointment that social justice and the care of creation had not received greater attention during the process, given the importance of Catholic Social Teaching for the witness of the Church was noted. The Team also noted an undercurrent regarding the experience of synodality itself and expectations for its future. Many reported an energising effect from the process to date and a rediscovery of joy through synodal engagement, while others reported disappointment at the uneven response and even the refusal of some communities and clergy to engage fully in the process, or at all. Co-responsibility had been experienced by some as an affirming reality, while others had experienced it at best as a form of tokenism.

43. There was an evident sense of fatigue and weariness in some quarters and a degree of uncertainty about the impact of the process to date. The likelihood of mobilising hope and energy through the next stages of the synodal pathway, not least having regard to diminished resources of personnel and finance, was reportedly viewed with scepticism by some.

Holding Tensions in the Spirit

44. Apart from the specific points of divergence, the Team also discerned a tension running through the commentary on how priorities had been identified at the Spring Gatherings. On the one hand, the submissions reported enthusiasm for extending an invitation to all to come and experience the life of the community of faith, by accompanying the people of our time in the all circumstances of their lives. The nature of synodality was understood as requiring us to engage with and accompany the baptised who have fallen away from the practice of the faith, but retain a sense of faith and access to the life of grace through their baptism. The feedback also recognised an obligation to reach out to those who are alienated from the Church or hostile, because of its institutional legacy or its opposition to norms and values which have become established in popular culture. On the other hand, a commitment to a culture of invitation and inclusion could give rise to a tailoring of the message to accommodate the sensibilities and sensitivities of those outside the community of faith. The risk of a dilution of message that leads to a compromised expression of the Christian life was noted as a concern in much of the commentary provided in the submissions.

Invitation and Expectation

45. In short, the Team discerned a tension between “invitation” and “expectation,” between a message of welcome and inclusion to all and the call to conversion of life which is central to the mission of the Church. This is not surprising nor a source of discouragement; on the contrary, it has been noted that “*the continuous articulation of certain polarities and tensions that structure the life of the Church and the way in which ecclesiological categories express it*” gave rise to the dynamism that animates the final document of the Universal Synod Assembly (*Pathways for the Implementation Phase of the Synod, page 18*).



Proposal from the National Synodal Team

46. As they gathered for their own discernment, the Team were mindful of some particular messages contained in the submissions. A number of responses emphasised the importance of joy and joyfulness as a mark of faith and a foundation for hope. Others urged attention to signs of life and hope in the Church in Ireland, green shoots of renewal, both those linked to the Irish Synodal Pathway and those reflecting other movements of the Spirit. A number of comments highlighted the importance of encouraging and supporting feasible steps towards renewal at the level of the parish so that practical measures would embed the substance and spirit of synodality. This accords with the emphasis in the *Pathways for the Implementation Phase of the Synod* document on the implementation of synodality which calls for next steps to have a tangible impact on the life of the Church and on the functioning of its structures and institutions.
47. In an extended and prayerful process of communal discernment of God's will for the Church in Ireland at this time, the Team members arrived at a remarkable consensus that what they were discerning across all the strands of submissions was a call to recognise the centrality of baptism as the foundation of the Christian life and mission, and the key to the vitality of communities of faith. In short, the Team concluded that it could offer as a gift to the Pre-Synodal Assembly in Kilkenny an invitation to see baptism as a unifying paradigm whose power would energise and guide the development of a synodal Church in Ireland and which could better respond to the foundational challenge of the Irish Synodal Pathway.

Baptism as the Unifying Paradigm

48. Baptism had indeed been highlighted in the responses from most dioceses and groups as an important theme; it headed the list of themes enumerated in the *Final Document* of the Universal Synod Assembly. However, it was not baptism as a specific theme which was discerned by the Team. Rather the Team discerned baptism as the root and unifying principle which
- gives coherence to all of the priorities identified in the submissions,
 - gives rise to fruitful and complementary charisms and ministries in the Church;
 - provides the entry point and a fruitful focus for catechesis and faith formation;
 - provides an unshakable foundation for inclusion and welcome.
49. The Team identified the grace of the sacrament and the calling of all the baptised as an enduring source of unity within which the tensions and divergences reported in the submissions could be faced and lived. Because baptism is the root and inspiration for a synodal culture, it is the key resource for sustaining engagement, respect and dialogue. Baptism provides inspiration for the framing of authentic consensus and the exercise of authority through respectful processes of decision-making and decision-taking. It is key to reconciling the tension between invitation and expectation. Deepening appreciation of the dignity of all the baptised and of the responsibility of the baptised to grow in faith, provide a basis for moving forward in renewal of discipleship and mission, even as the destination of the journey ahead remains uncertain and obscure. This

perspective on the radical nature of baptism places the next stage of the synodal pathway firmly within “*the priority concern to offer the people of God new opportunities to walk together and reflect on these experiences in order to reap their fruits for the mission (Pathways for the Implementation Phase of the Synod).*”

50. As the Spring Gatherings discerned priorities for the next phase of the Irish Synodal Pathway, so too the National Synodal Team undertook this task, reflecting on baptism as the integrating, explanatory, and animating key to the missionary challenge evident in the submissions. Once again, the Team used Conversation in the Spirit as its method of discernment.
51. In doing so, the Team considered both the results of the Spring Gatherings and its own conviction that baptism provides the most effective lens for the journey ahead. While it was not inevitable that the Team would reach the same conclusions as the Spring Gatherings, a strong convergence did emerge, alongside some divergence in respect of a small number of priorities given the different context and process of discernment in Dalgan Park.

Healing as an Explicit Priority

52. In the midst of the Team’s time together, a moment of profound silence proved decisive. Guided by the Scripture from 1 Kings 19, where God is encountered not in wind or fire but in the “*sound of sheer silence,*” members were invited to listen in stillness for what might be missing. In that silence, what emerged with clarity was the voice of survivors and victims of abuse in all its forms. It was in that prayerful silence that the conviction grew that healing, with its demands of justice, accountability, and reconciliation, must be named explicitly as an essential priority for the next phase of the Irish Synodal Pathway.
53. Following a focused Conversation in the Spirit, members shared their conclusions on the key priorities to be proposed. The Team reviewed the broad convergence and noted limited divergence, before confirming together that what had emerged offered a coherent and balanced agenda for consideration by the delegates gathering in Kilkenny. This was received with contentment, since it expressed interrelated dimensions of baptism as the Spirit-led insight guiding the Team.

The Seven Priorities Proposed

54. Accordingly, the Team now proposes the following priorities for reflection in the next steps of the Irish Synodal Pathway, to be received according to the circumstances of each ecclesial group within the Irish context, and in light of the magisterial guidance of the *Final Document* of the Universal Synod Assembly of 2024. In presenting these priorities, the Team invites all members of the Church to approach them through the lens of baptism, which remains the foundational paradigm for understanding, energising, and sustaining the life and mission of the Church. Baptism provides the framework within which these priorities are to be explored and lived, reminding each one of us that every initiative, ministry, and encounter of welcome, formation, and service is rooted in the grace and calling received at baptism:



1. **Belonging:** fostering a Church of welcome, inclusion, and safety where each person finds a home in community and in Christ.
 2. **Co-responsibility and Lay Ministry:** empowering all the baptised, women and men, to share responsibility for leadership and mission through new models of ministry and decision-making.
 3. **Family:** supporting the domestic Church as the primary place of faith transmission and belonging, and strengthening its connection with parishes and schools.
 4. **Formation and Catechesis:** deepening faith through lifelong formation that is Christ-centred, experiential, and equips the baptised for discipleship in today's world. Rooted not only in learning but also in liturgy and sacramental life, so that prayer and worship become living sources of faith, understanding, and mission.
 5. **Healing:** acknowledging wounds, especially those caused by abuse; committing to accountability, justice, and reconciliation; and ensuring safe spaces for survivors and all who carry pain.
 6. **Women:** recognising and including women's gifts, leadership, and co-responsibility at every level of Church life, as a matter of justice and credibility.
 7. **Youth:** engaging young people with authenticity, offering them meaningful roles in leadership and mission, and listening to their hopes and challenges.
55. At the conclusion of its gathering in Dalgan Park, the National Synodal Team could echo the experience of the participants in the Universal Synodal Assembly: *“we felt His presence in our midst as we lived conversation in the Spirit and listened to one another: the presence of He, who, in bestowing the Holy Spirit, continues to build among His people a unity that establishes harmony amidst differences (Final Document).”* These priorities, rooted in baptismal dignity and mission, are not an end but a beginning. They point towards a renewed Church in Ireland; one that is healing and welcoming, participatory and missionary, faithful to Jesus Christ and open to the Spirit's leading.

Further Reflective Questions

What is staying with you now?

What actions, questions, or connections are emerging for you?

How do the seven proposed priorities resonate with you?

Baptised in Christ: Reborn for Mission (A Reflection Paper)

56. We gratefully acknowledge Fr Liam Bergin (Ossory Diocese and Boston College) as the author of this reflection paper on baptism included here. The questions he poses are offered to prompt prayer and reflection while engaging with the text. They are not to be read as additional tasks or formal exercises, but as invitations to deeper discernment.
57. The Mass has been central to the Irish Catholic identity and experience. Every small village has a chapel; Mass rocks dot the country from Penal times. Devotion to and the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was central to our cultural and religious self-understanding. Vocations to priesthood abounded to ensure the celebration of this Sacred Mystery and of the other sacraments. Baptism has never formed the Irish Catholic imagination in the same way. Unlike many other European countries, no ancient baptismal sites have been found in our land. The contemporary emphasis on baptism as the foundation of Christian life and mission does not sit easily with Irish Catholicism.
58. This paper reflects on the renewed emphasis on baptism that was sparked by the Second Vatican Council and that has been flamed by Pope Francis and the synodal process. It examines the baptismal anointing with the Spirit (the pneumatological dimension), the sharing of the baptised in the priestly, prophetic and kingly ministry of Jesus Christ (the Christological dimension), the new life that is bestowed (the soteriological dimension), the gifts that are poured out on the Christian community in baptism (the ecclesiological dimension), and the promise of eternal glory that is extended at baptism (the eschatological dimension). Other contingent matters such as the call of the baptised to promote reconciliation and unity, and to promote ecological justice are also presented. Suggested questions for reflection are also included under eight headings.

Inverting the Pyramid

59. “Baptism is the foundation of Christian life. This is because it introduces everyone to the greatest gift, which is to be children of God, that is, to share in Jesus’ relationship to the Father in the Spirit. There is nothing higher than this baptismal dignity, equally bestowed upon each person, through which we are invited to clothe ourselves with Christ and be grafted onto Him like branches of the one vine.” These words from *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*, the Final Document of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (2023) – hereafter *FSC* – reaffirm the centrality of baptism in the life and mission of the Church as proposed by Vatican II. While an earlier draft of *Lumen Gentium* placed the chapter on the hierarchy before the chapter on the People of God, the conciliar bishops decided to reverse the order. This widely supported decision was intended to put an end to the pyramidal vision of the Church and to assert that all members of the Church are equal by reason of their baptism, prior to any subsequent differentiation.
60. The term “the people” has often been used to denote “the laity” or “the faithful” besides the pope, bishops, priests and religious. Vatican II intended the term “People of God” to refer to all the

baptised, “from the bishops to the last of the faithful lay people” (LG 12). As Jesuit historian John O’Malley remarked, “the symbolism of the change was potent: the first reality of the Church is horizontal and consists of all the baptised, without distinction of rank. Only then comes the vertical reality, hierarchy.” Indeed, as *FSC* notes, “The identity of the People of God flows from Baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This identity is lived out as a call to holiness and a sending out in mission, inviting all peoples to accept the gift of salvation (cf. Mt 28:18-19). The missionary synodal Church springs from Baptism, in which Christ clothes us with Himself (cf. Gal 3:27) and enables us to be reborn of the Spirit (cf. Jn 3:5-6) as children of God” (15).

How have you experienced this inversion in Ireland today?

Anointed by God’s Spirit

61. All four gospels record that Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist in the River Jordan, making it one of the most historically certain events in the life of Jesus. John preached a baptism for the forgiveness of sins as he gathered a community to await the coming Messiah. In the fullness of time Jesus, the Sinless One, went down into the waters of the Jordan in solidarity with sinful men and women, “to fulfil all righteousness” (Matt 3:15) and was baptised by John. The Synoptic Gospels describe the descent of the Holy Spirit and the voice of the Father that declared “You are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.” Emerging from the waters of the baptismal font, every Christian hears again that voice that was once heard on the banks of the Jordan. From this comes the reassurance that one has become a child of adoption (cf. Gal 4:4-7) and a brother or sister of Christ. Baptism is not a rite of passage into a privileged club. It is the sacrament by which believers, bathed in living water, enter the Spirit-filled community that seeks to manifest the reign of God the Father as Jesus did.

How could the centrality of baptism to Christian life be celebrated?

62. The New Testament writers shed little light on how baptism was celebrated. They simply presume that their audiences were already familiar with the rites of initiation. The word *baptizein* means to dip or to plunge and it suggests that the ritual was accomplished by a triple immersion “with the washing of water by the word” (Eph 5:26), in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38) or in the name of the Trinity (Matt 28:19). The Acts of the Apostles indicates that a laying-on of hands after the water rite was associated with the conferral of the Holy Spirit (8:14-20; 19:6).
63. Luke (4:16-21) situates the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry on a Sabbath day in the synagogue in Nazareth. Jesus was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah and found the passage where it was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.” He handed it back to the attendant as the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He then made the startling announcement: “Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.”

64. In the Jewish Scriptures the prophets announced that the Spirit of the Lord would rest on the hoped-for Messiah for his saving mission. Jesus asserts that this promise is now fulfilled in him. The descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus at his baptism by John was the sign that he is the Messiah, the “one who is to come.” He was conceived by the Holy Spirit; his whole life and mission are carried out in total communion with the Holy Spirit whom the Father gives without measure.
65. The Hebrew word “Messiah” means “anointed one”. It is translated as “Christos” in Greek. Christ means “anointed one” and Christians are the “anointed ones” who share in the messianic mission of Christ. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we who are reborn in the waters of baptism are anointed to proclaim the kingdom of God. The anointing “Christifies” those who receive it as it bestows the gift of the Holy Spirit.

How can we give expression to the fact that we are all God’s anointed ones?

Priests, Prophets and Kings

66. Anointing with oil is a very ancient and important ritual in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The Jews anointed three categories of people: priests, prophets and kings. Christians, by contrast, anoint everyone in baptism. Baptism gives all a shared, if differentiated, responsibility for the life and mission of the Church, and calls baptised and ordained to work together. All baptised members of the Church participate together in the prophetic or teaching office, in the priestly or sanctifying office, and in the kingly or governing office of Christ. This participation in the threefold mission of Christ is not delegated from the ordained ministry but “finds its source in the anointing of baptism, its further development in confirmation and its realization and dynamic sustenance in the Holy Eucharist” (*Christifideles Laici* 14).

What are the implications of this sharing in the non-delegated priestly, prophetic, priestly mission of Christ?

67. Because of their participation in the teaching office, all the faithful, including those without a formal theological training, have an instinct for the truth. “God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an instinct of faith – *sensus fidei* – which helps them to discern what is truly of God” (*Evangeli Gaudium*, 119). Participating in the priestly office enables the full and active participation of all in the celebration of the liturgy of the Church where the whole assembly offers praise and thanks to the Living God. Participating in the kingly office empowers all the baptised to play an active part in the governance of the Church. Together, participation in the threefold messianic mission of Jesus Christ calls for a Spirit-filled community that listens, prays, meditates, dialogues, accompanies, discerns, decides and acts as all the baptised journey in Christ to God the Father (*FSC*, 29). Even as the difference between the common priesthood of the baptised and the ministerial priesthood of the ordained is recognised, the essential equality of the one People of God is maintained. Ordained ministers are to serve the community of baptised disciples in its responsibility for the one mission of the Church, a mission that takes on new requirements in an ever-changing world.

As the numbers of ordained ministers decreases, what are the implications for the baptised?

New Life as Daughters and Sons of God

68. The Gospel of John (3:1-6) records the meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus, a leading Jew who comes under cover of darkness to speak with him. When Jesus declares that one must be born again, Nicodemus, with a certain sense of irony, asks how a grown man can be born again: “Can he go back into his mother’s womb?” Jesus responds that one must be “born through water and the Holy Spirit.”
69. The candidates for baptism who have received biological life in the womb of their mothers now receive new life in Christ and are born again as daughters and sons of God through water and the Holy Spirit. That is why the baptismal pond is referred to as a womb which begets people spiritually.
70. According to the account in Genesis 1, creation took place in seven days. The eighth day, then, was considered the day of the new creation. During the early centuries, baptisms were often celebrated in specially constructed buildings or baptistries. Many, like the baptistry at St. John Lateran in Rome, were octagonal in shape. This was to give architectural expression to the belief that in baptism the catechumens are born again and become a new creation. Many contemporary fonts are octagonal in shape. Take a look at the new font in St. Mary’s Cathedral in Kilkenny!
71. In his Letter to the Romans, St. Paul reminds the early Christian community that baptism unites them to the saving death of Christ and enables them to share his life: “You have been taught that when we were baptised in Christ Jesus we were baptised in his death; in other words, when we were baptised, we went into the tomb with him and joined him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father’s glory, we too might live a new life” (6:3-4). When baptism was celebrated during the Easter Vigil, as it was for many centuries, this connection between the paschal mystery and the new life given in baptism was readily made.
72. The triple immersion in the waters of baptism referred not just to the Father, Son, and Spirit, but it symbolised participation in the three days that Jesus spent in the tomb before the Father raised him to life, an event that would shortly be commemorated by the community at the Vigil. It was this new life that was communicated through the baptismal water.
73. Paul reminds us that new life with the risen Christ has already begun in those who have been baptised. Already now we enjoy the first fruits of eternal life. Despite our frailty and sinfulness, despite our weakness and brokenness, “nothing can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:39). The Church is the community of the baptised, a community of redeemed saints and sinners that witnesses to Christ’s life now as it awaits the fullness of risen life at the end of time. Further, the Church is wholly present when the saints in heaven and on earth join in one “hosanna” to the Lord God Almighty.

How does the promise of eternal life that is offered in baptism shape the present life of the Church?

Diversity of Gifts

74. St. Paul gives an impressive register of gifts or charisms that he found in the Church in Corinth and beyond. “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor 12:47). “Christians, individually and as part of ecclesial movements and associations, are called to bear fruit by sharing the gifts they have been given and to be witnesses to the Gospel. In the Christian community, all the baptised are enriched with gifts to share, each according to his or her vocation and way or condition of life.” (FSC 57).
75. A glance down any of our churches on a Sunday morning reveals an equally striking inventory. There are prophets and teachers, athletes and healers; there are labourers and miracle workers, poets and florists; there are linguists and singers, listeners and sharers; there are leaders and dreamers, pioneers and settlers. No one gift is more important than another, no one part of the body takes precedence over another. If one part refuses to function or is impeded in its rightful operation, then the whole body seizes up. Instead of boldly proclaiming the Kingdom, it limps blindly along, wracked by cancerous divisions. There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit. Within the diversity there is an essential unity.
76. By virtue of baptism, women and men have equal dignity as members of the People of God. “As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:27-28). 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” (FSC 60). In the reform of the Roman Curia set out in *Predicate Evangelium* (2022), Pope Francis separated jurisdiction (governing power) from ordination (sacramental power), paving the way for lay and religious women to hold leadership positions that are expressions of their baptismal calling. So too, the question of women’s access to diaconal ministry remains under review.

How can we harness the gifts present in the Irish Church today?

Creating Community

77. The *Apostolic Tradition*, a document from the early third century ascribed to the Roman priest Hippolytus, gives one of the earliest descriptions of the process that candidates underwent to become members of the Church. The candidates, or catechumens, were generally adults, with children baptised together with their parents.

78. A number of interesting points emerge from the *Apostolic Tradition* which may also speak to the Christian community today. First of all, while the catechumenate was a period of preparation for the adult candidates themselves it also served as an occasion of renewal for the whole Christian community that accompanied them on this journey. This was heightened during the season of Lent as its original purpose was to be a period when the whole Church engaged in a time of intense prayer, fasting, and almsgiving with the candidates in preparation for their Easter baptism. Secondly, through the series of scrutinies, tests, and exorcisms that the catechumens underwent, the community was eager to evaluate and to encourage their spiritual and moral growth as they prepared to be members of the Church. The decision to become a Christian in a hostile world was not to be taken lightly. The fruits of faith and love should be manifest in the candidates. Thirdly, the celebration of the rites during the Easter Vigil accentuated its association with the paschal mystery and with the triumph of the Lord Jesus over sin and death. Today, the placement of the paschal candle beside the baptismal font and the passing of the lighted candle to the parents or godparents of an infant candidate recalls this aspect.
79. Hippolytus describes a lengthy process lasting up to three years. The very process of undergoing these rites formed and shaped the new members of the Church. Tertullian, a North-African contemporary of Hippolytus, wrote that “Christians are made not born.” The ceremonies that the candidates underwent gave expression and shape to the lives of faith, hope and love that they desired to embrace.

What impact does the growing number of people in Ireland who are initiated as adults make on parish life?

Baptism and Reconciliation

80. In baptism Christians first encounter the mystery of reconciliation and the forgiveness of personal and original sin. Despite the great dignity to which we are called as daughters and sons of God, the sad fact is that Christians do sin even after they have passed through the waters of rebirth. That is something we acknowledge in the penitential act at the beginning of every Mass. Believers are constantly challenged to configure their lives to the person of Christ, to encounter again and again the saving power of God’s healing love, particularly through the sacrament of penance. Tertullian (+240) referred to penance as “the second plank following the shipwreck,” a phrase taken up by the Council of Trent.
81. Pope Francis has also emphasised this connection. “The Sacrament of Penance is like a ‘second baptism’ ... [T]he day of our Baptism is the point of departure for this most beautiful journey, a journey towards God that lasts a lifetime, a journey of conversion that is continually sustained by the Sacrament of Penance. ...[W]hen we go to confess our weaknesses, our sins, we go to ask the pardon of Jesus, but we also go to renew our Baptism through his forgiveness. And this is beautiful, it is like celebrating the day of Baptism in every Confession” (General Audience, 13 November 2013). The need for healing, reconciliation, and the rebuilding of trust has a personal and communal dimension, particularly in light of so many scandals related to different types of

abuse. The baptised have the privilege to know and the duty to extend reconciliation, to recognise mistakes, and to rebuild trust (*FSC* 46).

How do we awaken in the community of the baptised a need for on-going personal and communal reconciliation?

Saving Water

82. According to Catholic Social Teaching, water is a human right that it is due to all people. It is not an economic commodity that can be owned and traded for profit. Access to water is a right to life issue. Future wars are more likely to be about water than about oil. While oil may have substitutes or alternatives, water does not. In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis recognises the insidious connection between poverty and access to water. “Yet”, he insists, “our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because *they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity*” (LS, 30; italics in original).

83. The use of water in the sacrament of baptism makes an ethical claim on Christians to save the water with which they celebrate salvation. Water, like grace, belongs to no one in particular but is freely given for the wellbeing of all. Whenever politics or economics block general access to this universal right, the order of nature and grace is upended. The sacramental use of water calls on Christians to ensure uninhibited access to clean water for all God’s creatures, that they may sip and be refreshed, dip and be renewed, and know the fullness of life offered to all by God who creates, redeems and transforms with this saving gift. Christians are ethically committed to save the water by which they celebrate salvation.

How do we sow a greater understanding of Catholic social teaching among the community of the baptised?

“*Ite, missa est*”

84. The Second Vatican Council underlines that the Eucharist is “the source and summit of the life of the Church.” The parish community deepens its sense of its own identity as the Body of Christ when it celebrates the Sunday Eucharist, and as it draws from it the strength to live as disciples of the Risen Lord in a particular time and place. The retrieval of the centrality of baptism prompted by the synodal journey must lead to a deeper sense of the four-fold presence of Christ in the Eucharistic celebration. Christ is present in the assembled community, in the minister who presides, in the word proclaimed, and in the consecrated elements of bread and wine. It is precisely here, gathered in the Spirit as daughters and sons of the Father, and therefore as brother and sisters in Christ, that those who share a common dignity derived from baptism, are strengthened by word and sacrament to fulfil a common mission in the world.

“Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.”



Appendices

1. The Journey So Far

2. Current Timeline of the Irish Synodal Pathway

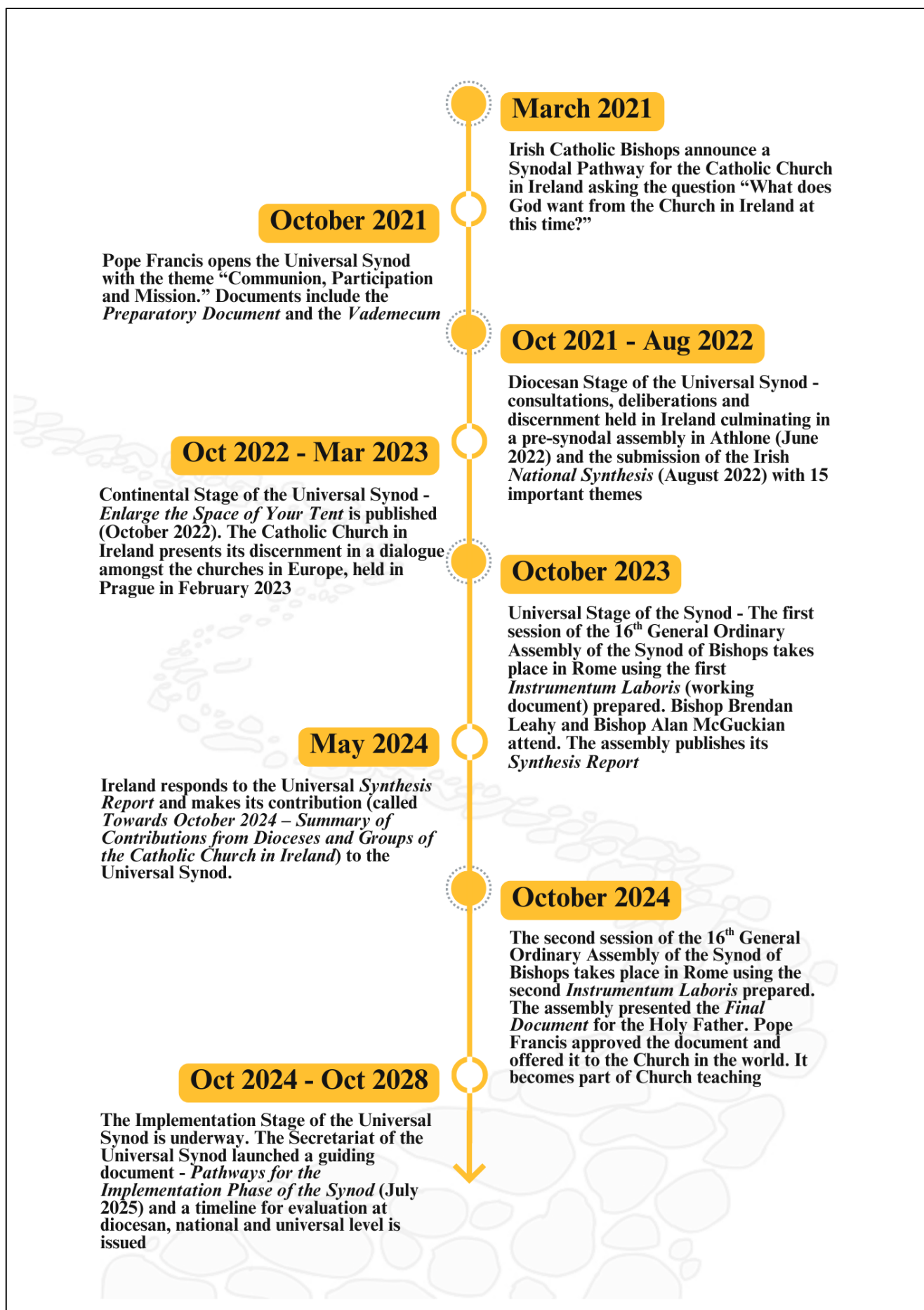
3. Conversation in the Spirit: A Resource

4. Facilitating a Conversation in the Spirit: The Basic Steps

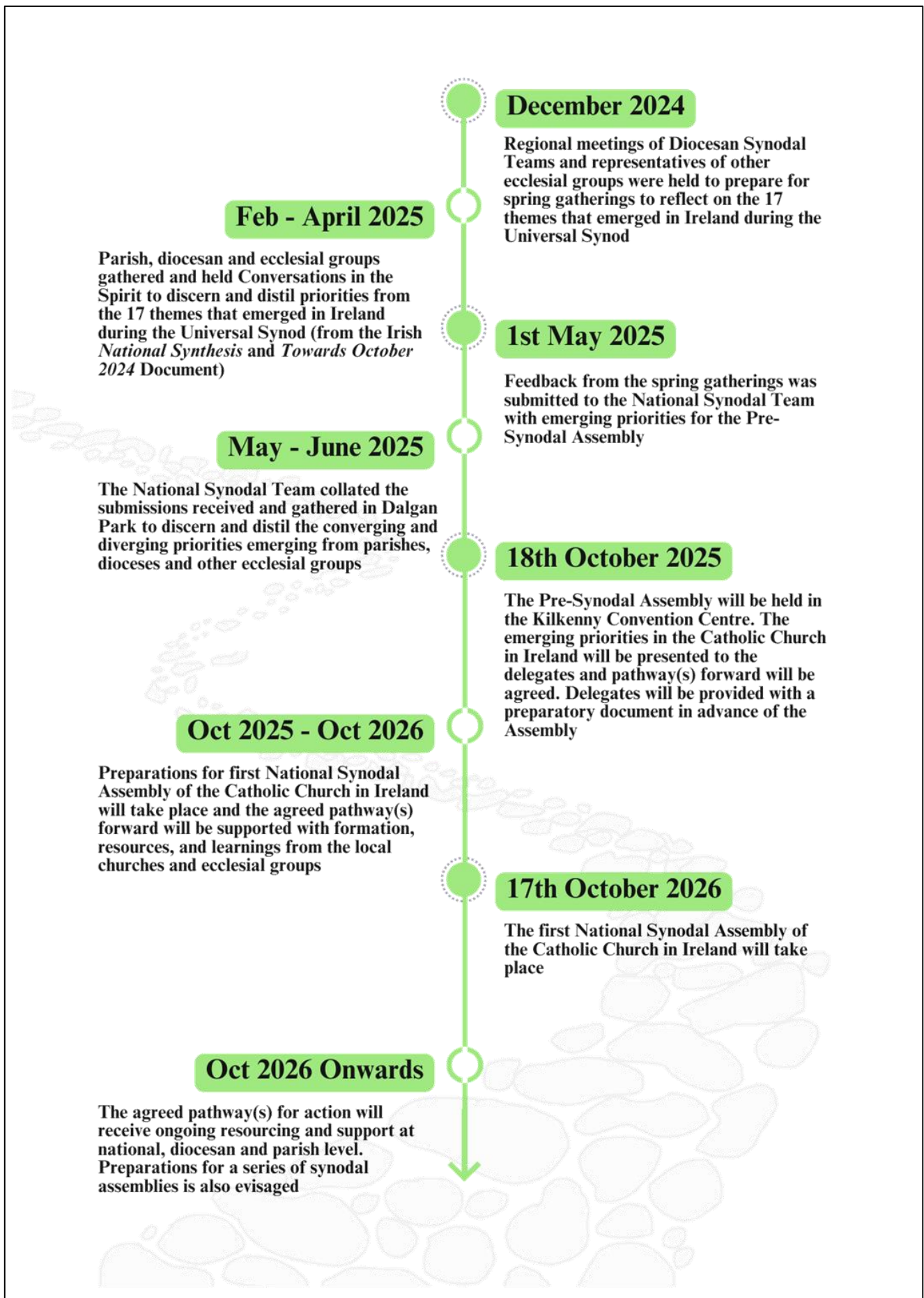
5. Further Reading



The Journey So Far



Current Timeline of the Irish Synodal Pathway



Conversation in the Spirit: A Resource

A Conversation in the Spirit focuses on the quality of one's capacity to listen as well as the quality of the words spoken. This means paying attention to the spiritual movements in oneself and in the other person during the conversation, which requires being attentive to more than simply the words expressed. This quality of attention is an act of respecting, welcoming, and being hospitable to others as they are. It is an approach that takes seriously what happens in the hearts of those who are conversing. There are two necessary attitudes that are fundamental to this process: active listening and speaking from the heart.

The aim of conversations in the Spirit is to create an atmosphere of trust and welcome, so that people can express themselves more freely. This helps them to take seriously what happens within them as they listen to others and speak. Ultimately, this interior attentiveness makes us more aware of the presence and participation of the Holy Spirit in the process of sharing and discernment.

The focus of a conversation in the Spirit is on the person to whom we are listening, on ourselves, and what we are experiencing at a spiritual level. The fundamental question is: "What is happening in the other person and in me, and how is the Lord working here?"

a) Active Listening

- Through active listening, the goal is to try and understand others as they are. We listen not only to what the other person says, but also to what he or she means and what he or she might be experiencing on a deeper level. This means listening with a heart that is open and receptive.
- This way of listening is "active" because it involves paying attention to more than one level of expression of the other. In order to do so, one must participate actively in the listening process.
- We listen to the other while he or she is speaking, and do not focus on what we are going to say afterwards.
- We welcome, without judgment, what the other person says, no matter what we think about the person or what they have said. Each person is an expert on his or her own life. We must listen in a way that is "more disposed to giving a good interpretation to what the other says than condemning it as false" (Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius, no. 22).
- We must believe that the Holy Spirit speaks to us through the other person.
- Welcoming without prejudice is a deep way of welcoming the other in his or her radical uniqueness.
- Active listening is letting oneself be influenced by the other and learning from the other.
- Active listening is demanding because it requires humility, openness, patience, and involvement, but it is an effective way of taking others seriously.

b) Speaking from the Heart

- This means sincerely expressing oneself, one's experience, one's sentiments and thoughts.
- It involves speaking about one's own experience and what one truly thinks and feels.

- We take responsibility not only for what we say, but also for what we feel. We do not blame others for what we feel.
- We share the truth as we see it and as we live it, but do not impose it.
- Speaking from the heart is offering a generous gift to the other, in return for being actively listened to.
- This process is greatly enriched by a regular personal practice of prayerful self-examen. Without a habit of discernment and knowledge of oneself and how God is present in one's life, one cannot actively listen or speak from the heart.

In summary, what are the desired attitudes for a conversation in the Spirit?

- Listen actively and attentively.
- Listen to others without judgment.
- Pay attention not only to the words, but also to the tone and feelings of the one who is speaking.
- Avoid the temptation of using the time to prepare what you will say instead of listening.
- Speak intentionally.
- Express your experiences, thoughts, and feelings as clearly as you can.
- Listen actively to yourself, mindful of your own thoughts and feelings as you speak.
- Monitor possible tendencies to be self-centred when speaking.

Note: Conversation in the Spirit is a method for deep listening and heartfelt sharing. It is also a structured approach that guides thoughtful, Spirit-led decision-making, cultivating clarity, discernment, and collective wisdom, and helping participants move from conversation toward decisions and action with integrity and care.

Facilitating a Conversation in the Spirit: The Basic Steps *(Estimated time: 2 hours)*

1. Preparation: Before coming to the group meeting, participants carry out a time of personal prayer and reflection over the question at hand. Usually some background information as well as some points and questions for prayer are provided. An adequate time of about 30 min to 1 hour can be set aside for this. At the end of the prayer period, participants take stock of the fruits of their prayer and decide what they will share with the group.

2. Gathering: Ideally each group can comprise about 6-8 persons. A facilitator is appointed for the group meeting and he or she welcomes all the participants. An opening prayer is said, and each person may share one or two words that describe his or her interior state at that moment. The facilitator may also briefly recap the sequence of steps as below. Usually volunteers are also requested for note-taking and time-keeping.

3. The First Round: Each person takes turns to share about what happened during the personal prayer time and shares the fruits of his or her prayer. Everyone is given the same amount of time to speak (e.g. 3 minutes). The focus is to listen to one another rather than simply think about what one wants to say. Participants are invited to open their hearts and minds to listen to the one who is speaking, and be attentive to how the Holy Spirit is moving. Between each person, the group may take a brief pause to absorb what was said. During this round there are no discussions or interactions between participants except to ask for clarification about a word or phrase if necessary.

4. Silence: A time of silence is observed, during which participants attend to how they have been moved during the first round, what struck them as they listened, and what were the notable points of consolation or desolation if any.

5. The Second Round: Participants share what emerged within them during the time of silence. No one is obliged to speak, and participants can share spontaneously without any particular order. This is not a time for discussing or refuting what someone else says, nor for bringing up what participants forgot to mention in the first round. Rather, it is an opportunity to respond to questions like:

- How was I affected by what I heard?
- Is there a common thread in what was shared? Is there something missing that I had expected would be said?
- Was I especially touched by a particular sharing?
- Have I received any particular insight or revelation? What is it?
- Where did I experience a sense of harmony with others as we shared with one another?

This second round enables the group to realise what unites them. It is here that signs of the action of the Holy Spirit in the group begin to manifest themselves, and the conversation becomes an experience of shared discernment.

6. Silence: Another time of silence is observed for participants to note how they were moved during the second round, and particularly what key points seem to be emerging in the group.

7. The Third Round: Participants share what emerged from the preceding time of silence. They may also take note of the ways in which the Holy Spirit may be moving the group. A prayer of thanksgiving can conclude the conversation.

8. Review and Report: Finally, the group can briefly review and reflect on how the conversation proceeded, and decide on the main points they will report from the conversation.

Note: The term “diocese” refers to local churches in general, and can be substituted with the terms parish, movement, association, group, etc. This resource has been taken from the *Vademecum* (the original preparatory document for the Universal Synod) and adapted for the Irish Synodal Pathway.

The Conversation in the Spirit

A dynamic of discernment in the synodal Church



Silence, prayer and listening to the Word of God

Personal Preparation

By entrusting oneself to the Father, conversing in prayer with the Lord Jesus and listening to the Holy Spirit, each one prepares his or her own contribution to the question about which he or she is called to discern.

Taking the Word and Listening

Each person takes turns speaking from his or her own experience and prayer, and listens carefully to the contribution of others.



Silence and Prayer



Making Space for Others and the Other

From what the others have said, each one shares what has resonated most with him or her or what has aroused the most resistance in him or her, allowing himself or herself to be guided by the Holy Spirit: "When, listening, did my heart burn in my chest?"

Silence and Prayer

Building Together

Together we dialogue on the basis of what emerged earlier in order to discern and gather the fruit of the conversation in the Spirit: to recognize intuitions and convergences; to identify discordances, obstacles and new questions; to allow prophetic voices to emerge. It is important that everyone can feel represented by the outcome of the work. "To what steps is the Holy Spirit calling us together?"

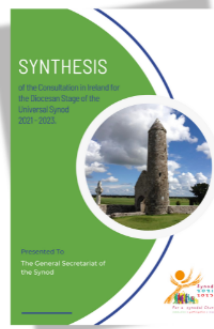


Final Prayer of Thanksgiving

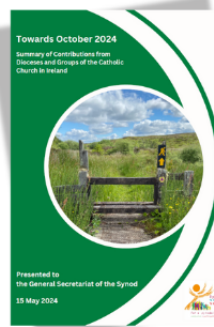
Adapted from the resources provided by the Secretariat of the Universal Synod For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission

Further Reading

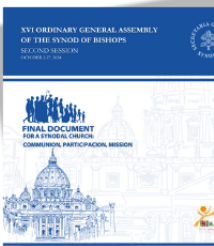
The Irish *National Synthesis* captured key themes from faith-based conversations held across Ireland between October 2021 and May 2022, as part of the Universal Synod 2021–2024. Dioceses and groups submitted their reflections in May 2022, which were prayerfully reviewed during Pentecost by the National Steering Committee. These themes were shared at a national assembly in Athlone in June 2022. The final synthesis was then submitted to the Synod office in Rome in August 2022.



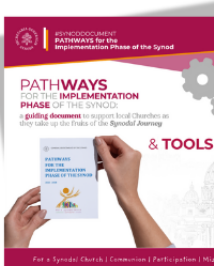
Towards October 2024 was Ireland's contribution to the next phase of the Universal Synod, reflecting on the first synodal assembly's report. It gathers insights from all dioceses and several lay groups and movements. These submissions were once again reviewed in prayerful discernment during Holy Week 2024 and a summary of contributions was finalised and approved. Included was a supporting appendix, *Keeping the Synodal Dynamism Alive*, which shared testimonies and examples of synodality in action across Ireland.



The *Final Document* of the Synod (October 2024) sets out a vision for a more participatory, missionary, and listening Church. It affirms the vital role of all the baptised in shaping the Church's life and mission, and calls for greater transparency, accountability, a culture of dialogue and shared responsibility. At its heart is a call to "relational conversion. Presented to Pope Francis by the Assembly, the document was approved and formally offered to the universal Church. It now becomes part of the Church's teaching and guidance for the future.



The *Pathways* document, published by the Synod secretariat in July 2025, offers guidance for implementing synodality within the Catholic Church. It outlines how local churches can integrate synodality as a core aspect of their mission and emphasises the role of all the baptised in this process. The document focuses on facilitating dialogue, promoting inclusivity, and fostering communion among all members of the Church.



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