

# REPORT FROM THE SPRING SYNODAL GATHERINGS 2025



Diocese of Clonfert  
Diocese of Galway,  
Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora



L I S T E N I N G  
D I S C E R N M E N T

J O U R N E Y

M I S S I O N

F U T U R E

S H A R I N G

C R E A T I V I T Y

C O M M U N I O N

A U T H E N T I C I T Y

The contributing parishes:

**From the Diocese of Clonfert:** the Parish of Aughrim and Kilconnell, the Parish of Ballinakill and Derrybrien, the Parish of Ballinasloe, Creagh and Kilclooney, the Parish of Ballymacward and Gurteen, the Parish of Cappataggle and Kilrickle, the Parish of Clostoken and Kilconieran, the Parish of Duniry and Abbey, the Parish of Fahy and Quansboro, the Parish of Killimor and Tiranascragh, the Parish of Kilnadeema and Aille, the Parish of Kiltullagh, Killimordaly and Clooncagh, the Parish of Lawrencetown and Kiltormer, the Parish of Leitrim and Ballydugan, the Parish of Loughrea, the Parish of Lusmagh, the Parish of Eyrecourt, Clonfert and Meelick, the Parish of Portumna, the Parish of Tynagh and Killeen, and the Parish of Woodford and Looscaun.

**From the Diocese of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora:** the Cathedral Parish of Our Lady Assumed into Heaven and St Nicholas, the Parish of An Spidéal, the Parish of Carron and New Quay, the Parish of St Mary's, Claddagh, the Parish of Claregalway, the Parish of Clarinbridge, the Parish of Craughwell, the Parish of Ennistymon and Lahinch, the Parish of Gort and Beagh, the Parish of Kinvara, the Parish of Lisdoonvarna and Kilshanny, the Parish of Mervue, the Parish of Ballybane, Good Shepherd Parish, the Parish of Castlegar, the Parish of Moycullen, the Parish of Oranmore, the Parish of Killannin, the Parish of St Augustine, the Parish of Salthill, and the Parish of Ballinfoyle.



# Background

During the months of March, April and May 2025, the Diocese of Clonfert and the Diocese of Galway invited people to “have their voice in the national conversation on the future of the Church in Ireland.” Convinced that the primary organs of synodality at a local level were the newly formed and recently trained Parish Pastoral Councils, the Inter-Diocesan Synodal Committee asked all Parish Pastoral Councils to convene a meeting at which they would engage in a scaffolded exercise to discern, in the context of prayer, what should be on the agenda of a national discussion on the future of the Church in Ireland. They were then asked to identify, through further discernment, the topics they believed most needed to be addressed.

Over forty Parish Pastoral Councils participated and submitted feedback. Parallel to this, a group of thirty priests engaged in the same exercise. The fruit of these processes became the basis for *Le Chéile: A Gathering for Members of Parish Pastoral Councils*, organised by the newly established An Ghailíl: Centre of Formation for Mission and Ministry, held on 10 May 2025 and facilitated by Ms Patricia Carroll and Fr Billy Swan. Over two hundred delegates from more than sixty parishes attended this day-long gathering.



# The Discussion



The contemporary cultural context, in which Catholic faith and practice appear to have been widely rejected, has prompted a discussion on how people—particularly the young—can be encouraged towards belief. Church attendance continues to decline, vocations to the priesthood are few, and both clergy and congregations are ageing. Many local parishes and faith communities are experienced less as life-giving centres of faith and more as providers of religious services. A significant number are in a phase of decline, with some becoming unsustainable in their current form.

Liturgies are at times perceived as formulaic and lacking in relevant meaning. Many adult Catholics possess only a childlike understanding of the faith, while many young Catholics require a deeper and more substantial formation than is currently being offered. Handing on the faith—especially within families and to younger generations—remains a serious challenge. While schools make a valuable contribution, they need to be complemented by other forms of catechesis and faith experience at home and within the parish or faith community.

Both laity and clergy are struggling to understand and live out their roles within a renewed vision of Church. There is a growing desire for a more participative and co-responsible model of leadership at parish level and more broadly within the Church. Formation for ministry, mission, and faith is difficult both to access and to provide. Communicating the message of faith meaningfully in the context of the digital age continues to be a major challenge.



“WE SHOULD NOT FORGET THAT OUR PASTORAL COUNCILS ARE THE MOST TANGIBLE LOCAL EXPRESSION OF A SYNODAL CHURCH, WHERE PRIESTS AND LAITY WORK AND WALK TOGETHER IN RESPONSE TO GOD’S CALL.”

BISHOP MICHAEL DUIGNAN



# Emerging Themes

## Towards Renewal Through Listening, Belief and Community Life

The predominant emerging theme from the above processes was the struggle to believe in the Christian understanding of God and the Catholic vision of life in contemporary Ireland. This was closely linked to a strong desire to support, sustain, and grow living, life-giving, welcoming, and outward-looking local faith communities—communities where priests and people work together in a spirit of genuine co-responsibility. These are communities where faith is meaningfully celebrated, with particular attention given to the celebration of Sunday Mass.

There was a clear recognition of the challenges involved in handing on the faith to younger generations and in including young people in a meaningful way in the life and worship of local parishes and faith communities. In this regard, the role of local Catholic schools was highlighted. Outreach to young families was identified as a particular concern. Many participants spoke of the need to nurture and develop the richness of lay ministries. There was a widespread and tangible desire for a sustained and comprehensive programme of formation—for ministry, for sacramental preparation outside of school settings, and for general faith development.

The issue of priesthood, the evolving model of priestly ministry, and vocations to the priesthood also emerged. Participants noted the importance of outreach to the margins, openness to others, and meaningful engagement with the concerns of women. There was a genuine desire to keep safeguarding as a visible priority and to continue addressing the legacy of abuse.

There was a strong degree of agreement on the main emerging themes. Some would have ranked them slightly differently. Some agreed/some disagreed on the value of Catholic Schools, the role of Women in the Church, models of sacramental preparation, models of lay and priestly ministry, use of modern means of communication, etc.



# Key Emerging Themes



- The struggle to believe today, along with the desire and journey towards a deeper understanding of the faith—so that it becomes more personally meaningful and can be shared and explained more effectively
- Handing on the faith, especially to young people
- Nurturing young Catholic families
- The creation of vibrant, welcoming, outward-reaching local parishes and faith communities
- Priests and people working together in a spirit of co-responsibility
- Living priesthood today: changing models of ordained ministry and the question of vocations
- Meaningful faith celebrations, particularly the celebration of Sunday liturgies
- The role of Catholic schools in faith formation and transmission
- The need for formation: to become mature believers, for mission, and for ministry



We want to be a synodal Church, a Church that moves forward, a Church that always seeks peace, that always seeks charity, that always seeks to be close above all to those who are suffering. Pope Leo XIV



# Concluding Words



Given that the cohort who participated in this process were, to a large extent, active members of their parishes and faith communities, a strong sense of commitment to the Catholic faith and the Catholic vision of life was evident. This was accompanied by a sense of sadness at the decline in faith, religious practice, and parish life, but also by a firm belief in the presence of the Holy Spirit among God's people. There was a tangible desire to rekindle the embers of faith so that new generations might encounter the joy, meaning, and personal and communal transformation that a life of faith offers and that a vibrant faith community fosters.

This report has been submitted to the National Synodal Steering Group as a contribution to their discernment on the future direction of the Irish Synodal Pathway.





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