

Irish Synodal Pathway – Working Group Submission Template

Working Group Priority Area: **Co-responsibility and Lay Ministry**

Date of Submission: *31st May 2026*

1. Group Overview

Members:

[List Names]

Fr Éamonn Fitzgibbon

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Convener:

Ms Julieann Moran

National Synodal Team Representative:

Ms Julieann Moran

2. Statement of Discernment and Vision

(Maximum 800 words. This text will be read aloud at the National Synodal Assembly on 17th October 2026.)

How we worked together: What we did: What we heard:

Describe your synodal approach, including listening, prayer, discernment, dialogue, and consultation. Outline the key elements of your work (meetings, consultations, research, engagement with Baptised and Sent, etc.). Summarise the principal insights, experiences, tensions, and themes that emerged. Why these proposals emerged?

Our work emerged from the findings of the Baptised and Sent preparatory document and was shaped by a synodal approach rooted in prayer, listening, dialogue, discernment and consultation. We recognised the common dignity and shared responsibility that flow from Baptism, as members of the one people of God, and reflected on how the gifts and charisms of all the baptised can contribute more fully to the life and mission of the Church.

Drawing on the theology of the People of God and the synodal vision emerging throughout the universal Church, we examined the pastoral realities facing the Church in Ireland and considered the structures, formation pathways and leadership models needed to foster greater participation in ministry and mission.

Several key principles emerged. First, co-responsibility is integral to the Church's identity and mission. Shared leadership, as a key dimension of co-responsibility, should be visible at every level of ecclesial life and modelled by Church leaders locally and nationally. Second,

formation is essential for the exercise of the baptismal priesthood discovering and exercising our baptismal identity. A coordinated national approach to lay ministry should provide accessible and ongoing formation in spirituality, theology, leadership, discernment, governance and pastoral practice. Wherever possible, lay and ordained ministers should be formed together to strengthen mutual understanding, trust and collaboration.

Third, participatory structures must be strengthened. Parish and diocesan pastoral councils should have a meaningful deliberative role, while effective participatory bodies should also exist at regional and national levels. The formation of a National Ecclesial Council made up of lay, clergy and religious along with regular broader assemblies can support shared reflection, formation and discernment across the Church.

Finally, a truly co-responsible Church requires cultural and structural renewal. Existing structures should be reviewed to ensure they support authentic participation and mission. National Church structures should continue to develop in a more synodal direction building enabling the whole People of God to contribute to discernment and leadership.

These proposals arise from the conviction that the gifts of all the baptised are essential to the Church's mission. They seek to move beyond models of lay involvement as assistance to clergy and towards a genuinely co-responsible Church characterised by shared leadership, formation, discernment and missionary renewal for future generations. (369 words)

Vision for the Church in Ireland:

Articulate the pastoral and missionary vision that has shaped your work.

The Catholic Church in Ireland stands at a moment of profound transition and opportunity. Rooted in the ecclesial vision of the Second Vatican Council and renewed through the global synodal journey of the universal Church, there is a growing recognition that the future vitality of the Church depends upon fostering a truly co-responsible Church in which all the baptised participate actively in the mission of Christ.

“We all enter the Church as lay people.” (*Pope Francis GA March 2026*) Baptism is the foundation of Christian life and mission. From baptism flows a common dignity, vocation and responsibility among bishops, priests, deacons, religious and lay women and men. The Church is called to become more missionary, collaborative and credible through structures and relationships that embody shared prayer, discernment, decision-making, action and service.

This vision is not simply a response to a clergy crisis, nor merely an organisational adaptation. Rather, it reflects the missionary dimension of the discipleship of all the baptised and the call of the Holy Spirit to renew the Church for the present age. It seeks to empower and re-energise the People of God in their faith, affirm the shared mission of all the baptised, and embed a synodal model of Church across Ireland.

The goal is the fostering of a more loving and caring society and helping to realise God's Kingdom on earth.

Theological Foundations

Central to this vision is a renewed understanding of baptism as the basis of Christian discipleship and ecclesial participation. The gifts and charisms of all the baptised are recognised as essential bearers of the Holy Spirit's work in the Church and the world.

This vision moves beyond an understanding of collaboration as mere assistance to clergy toward a differentiated co-responsibility, rooted in communion of the Church in which clergy and lay people including religious share responsibility for the Church's life and mission while exercising distinct yet reciprocal roles in leadership, pastoral ministry, and mission.

Authority within the Church is understood fundamentally as holiness and service, not control or privilege. Mature interdependence between ordained and lay ministries enables the whole Church to flourish. Shared leadership becomes not a delegation of responsibility but a shared ownership of and participation with the mission and vision of Church.

Lay ministry may be formal or informal, instituted or commissioned. The Church in Ireland has discerned the need for new models of ministry and leadership, parish support structures and inclusive decision-making processes in which all are formed and commissioned to participate actively in the mission of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The Catholic Church in Ireland envisions a synodal and co-responsible Church in which bishops, priests, deacons, religious and lay women and men discern, lead and minister together in service of the Gospel.

This vision seeks:

- to embed synodal decision-making at every level of Church life;
- to foster shared leadership between lay and ordained ministers;
- to develop representative and participatory structures across parishes, dioceses and national bodies;
- to place particular emphasis on strengthening the participation and leadership of women in these representative bodies.
- to identify, form, accompany and commission lay ministers;
- to renew clergy and laity through co-responsible leadership;
- to build capacity among the laity and clergy to sustain and renew the Church into the future;
- to take risks by stepping out in faith and speaking with courage to one another
- and to strengthen the Church's missionary witness in Irish society.

565 words

Proposal 1

Title:

A National Framework for Co-Responsibility and Synodal Ministry

Description:

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

- 1) the development of a national directive on co-responsibility,*
- 2) the promotion of co-responsible leadership structures,*
- 3) the provision of practical resources and*
- 4) supports to assist implementation throughout the Church.*

Rationale:

The synodal process is highlighting the need for a clearer understanding and more consistent practice of co-responsibility across the Church. While many lay people, clergy and religious already collaborate in ministry, approaches vary significantly across dioceses and parishes. A national framework would provide theological clarity, pastoral direction and practical guidance, helping to move beyond isolated initiatives toward a shared culture of mission, discernment and leadership. Grounding ministry in baptismal vocation and shared responsibility will strengthen participation and enable the Church to respond more effectively to contemporary pastoral challenges.

Intended Impact:

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

Implementation Pathway:

- **National Level:** Develop and promulgate a national directive on co-responsibility and synodal ministry that articulates the theological foundations of shared mission, outlines pathways for participation, establishes principles for co-responsible leadership, and provides practical guidance for implementation. Ensure that the

framework promotes consistency across dioceses while allowing flexibility to respond to local circumstances.

- **Diocesan Level:** Support dioceses in implementing the framework through pastoral planning processes, leadership development initiatives and the establishment of structures that foster collaboration among clergy, religious and lay women and men. Encourage dioceses to integrate co-responsibility into governance, ministry formation and mission planning.
- **Parish and Regional Level:** Promote co-responsible leadership models involving clergy and laity through parish leadership teams, regional pastoral partnerships, mission parishes and other forms of shared ministry. Encourage team-based approaches to pastoral planning, evangelisation ministry and community engagement rather than reliance on individual leadership roles.
- **Formation and Support:** Develop practical resources to support implementation, including manuals, assessment tools, advisory services, mentoring facilitation programmes and examples of good practice. Provide formation opportunities that deepen understanding of baptismal vocation, discernment, co-responsible leadership and synodal ministry.
- **Resources and Responsibilities:** The Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, diocesan leadership teams, pastoral councils (diocesan and parish) and relevant national agencies would share responsibility for implementation. Resources required would include theological and pastoral expertise, formation programmes, facilitation and mentoring networks, practical implementation guides, and mechanisms for monitoring progress and sharing learning across dioceses.

Title: Proposal 2

Cultural and Structural Renewal for a Synodal Church

Description:

This proposal within the National Framework seeks to incarnate synodality as an expression of communion, participation and co-responsibility within the structures, governance and decision-making processes of the Church in Ireland. It calls for the establishment of enduring national, diocesan and parish structures that enable the People of God to participate meaningfully in discernment, pastoral planning and leadership. The proposal includes

- 1) the creation of a permanent National Ecclesial Council,*
- 2) reform of national governance structures to strengthen collaboration across bishops, clergy, religious and laity*
- 3) the mandatory implementation of participatory bodies at parish and diocesan level, and*
- 4) the introduction of regular evaluation and accountability processes.*

Rationale:

The synodal journey is highlighting a widespread desire for greater participation, transparency, accountability and shared responsibility. These values must be embedded within the Church's hierarchical communion. While many structures for consultation already exist, they are often inconsistent, underdeveloped or limited in influence. To sustain the fruits of synodality and foster a culture of discernment and collaboration, these values must be embedded within renewed Church's structures and governance at every level. This proposal seeks to ensure that synodality as envisioned in the *Final Document of the Universal Synod* (Pope Francis 2024) becomes a lived reality rather than a temporary initiative.

Intended Impact:

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

Implementation Pathway:

- **National Level:** Establish a permanent National Ecclesial Council of lay women, men, religious and clergy, to gather regularly for prayer, discernment, consultation and pastoral planning. Determine an appropriate frequency while ensuring consistent opportunities for national dialogue and discernment. Explore complementary

structures that can work alongside the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference to facilitate ongoing synodal reflection and pastoral leadership, including meaningful lay participation in national decision-making and mission planning.

- **National Governance Reform:** Review and develop governance structures within the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference to strengthen participation, transparency, accountability and shared responsibility. Consider mechanisms through which clergy, religious and lay people will contribute to pastoral oversight and strategic planning and implementation. Place particular emphasis on strengthening the participation and leadership of women in these representative bodies.
- **Diocesan Level:** Require every diocese to establish and maintain active Diocesan Pastoral Councils, leadership teams and finance committees operating according to synodal principles. Introduce annual consultation, implementation and evaluation cycles, supported by public diocesan synodal reports outlining progress, formation initiatives, pastoral developments, challenges and future priorities.
- **Parish Level:** Require every parish to maintain active Parish Pastoral Councils, leadership teams and finance committees that exercise genuine participation in discernment, pastoral planning, implementation and ongoing evaluation rather than functioning solely as consultative bodies. Provide appropriate formation and resources to support effective synodal practice.
- **Resources and Responsibilities:** The National Ecclesial Council together with the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, diocesan leadership teams and parish leadership structures would share responsibility for resourcing and implementation. Resources required would include synodal formation programmes, governance guidelines, facilitation training, administrative support, and systems for monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

Proposal 3

Title:

Formation, Education and Leadership Development for a Synodal and Co-Responsible Church

Description:

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

- 1) joint formation initiatives,*
- 2) leadership development programmes,*
- 3) creation of pathways for lay ministry,*
- 4) renewal of seminary and clergy formation,*
- 5) practical supports to strengthen capacity for synodal life and mission.*

Rationale:

The synodal journey is highlighting the need for deeper formation to support the cultural and structural changes required for a more participatory Church. Synodality and co-responsibility require new skills, attitudes and competencies, including discernment, collaboration, facilitation and shared leadership. Many clergy, religious and lay women and men have not received formation in these areas. A sustained commitment to formation is therefore essential if synodal practices are to become embedded in the life of the Church. Investing in co-responsible leadership development and education will equip individuals and communities to participate more fully in the Church's mission and to exercise their baptismal vocation with confidence and competence.

Intended Impact:

- A well-formed Church in which clergy, religious and lay women and men are equipped to participate fully in synodal life and mission.
- Stronger cultures of collaboration, discernment and shared leadership across all levels of the Church.
- Increased confidence and capacity among lay leaders and pastoral ministers.
- Renewal of ordained ministry through formation that emphasises co-responsibility and co-responsible leadership.
- Greater consistency and quality in pastoral leadership, ministry and mission planning throughout Ireland.

Implementation Pathway:

- **National Level:** Develop a coordinated national process for formation and leadership development that supports synodality, co-responsibility and mission. Establish common standards, learning outcomes and formation resources while allowing adaptation to local contexts. Promote collaboration among dioceses, theological institutions, seminaries and pastoral agencies in the delivery of programmes.
- **Joint Formation Programmes:** Create formation pathways in which lay women and men, seminarians, deacons, priests, bishops and religious participate together in learning experiences focused on co-responsible leadership, discernment, synodal practice and shared mission. Encourage opportunities for mutual learning and relationship-building across vocations and ministries.
- **Formation for Co-Responsibility:** Provide accessible and ongoing formation in discernment, facilitation, governance, shared decision-making, pastoral planning, community development and synodal leadership. Ensure programmes combine theological reflection with practical skills and are available through a variety of delivery methods, including in-person, online and blended learning.
- **Formation for Lay Ministry:** Develop clear pathways for Lay Pastoral Ministers and other lay leaders that include theological education, pastoral skills training, spiritual formation, mentoring, accompaniment and continuing professional development. Establish appropriate processes for recognition, support and ongoing formation within dioceses and parishes.
- **Renewal of Seminary and Clergy Formation:** Review seminary programmes and continuing clergy development to ensure they reflect a synodal and co-responsible vision of Church. Include explicit preparation for co-responsible leadership, team ministry, participatory governance and partnership with lay leaders in pastoral planning and mission.
- **Local Empowerment and Capacity Building:** Support parishes, pastoral areas and dioceses through workshops, digital resources, regional training opportunities and mentoring networks. Encourage diocesan collaboration in the development and sharing of formation resources, expertise and personnel.
- **Resources and Responsibilities:** Responsibility for implementation would be shared by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference with a new National Ecclesial Council, diocesan leadership teams, seminaries, theological institutes, formation providers and pastoral agencies. Resources required would include qualified formation personnel, educational materials, digital learning platforms, mentoring structures, funding for programme delivery, and systems for evaluation and continuous improvement.

Proposal 4

Title:

Support and Recognition of Lay Ministry,
(Commissioning, Blessing and Instituting where appropriate)

Description:

This proposal seeks to identify, recognise, commission, institute where appropriate, and support lay ministry as an essential dimension of the Church's mission in Ireland. It aims to foster a culture in which the gifts, charisms and ministries of all the baptised are valued, encouraged and publicly affirmed. The proposal includes

- 1) the promotion of stable instituted ministries, i.e formally recognised in Canon Law*
- 2) the recognition of new and emerging forms of lay ministry,*
- 3) the provision of formation and*
- 4) accompaniment for lay ministers, and*
- 5) the development of sustainable structures to support lay leadership and service within the Church.*

Rationale:

The synodal process is revealing a strong desire for greater recognition of the essential contribution of lay people to the life and mission of the Church. Across Ireland, many lay women and men already exercise significant pastoral, liturgical, catechetical and leadership responsibilities, often without formal recognition or consistent support. As the Church continues to respond to changing pastoral realities, there is a growing need to acknowledge, strengthen and sustain these ministries. Public recognition, commissioning and support can affirm baptismal vocation, encourage participation in our shared mission, and help cultivate a culture of co-responsibility rooted in the gifts of all women and men.

Intended Impact:

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

Implementation Pathway:

- **National Level:** Develop a national process for the recognition, commissioning and support of lay ministry that provides theological grounding, pastoral guidance and practical pathways for implementation. Promote a consistent approach across dioceses while allowing flexibility to respond to local pastoral needs.
- **Recognition and Institution of Ministries:** Promote the stable instituted ministries already recognised by the Church, including catechists, lectors and acolytes, and encourage their wider implementation where appropriate. Develop public commissioning, blessing and recognition processes for both formal and informal ministries that contribute to the mission of the Church.
- **Support for New and Emerging Ministries:** Recognise and support ministries that respond to contemporary pastoral realities, including lay parish administration, leadership of prayer and worship, youth ministry, bereavement ministry, hospitality, outreach, pastoral coordination and other locally identified needs. Encourage dioceses and parishes to identify emerging ministries and provide pathways for their development and support.
- **Formation and Accompaniment:** Establish processes through which lay ministers are identified, encouraged, accompanied and supported throughout their ministry. Provide opportunities for spiritual formation, mentoring, theological education, practical skills development and ongoing pastoral support. Ensure that formation and accompaniment are available both to those in formal ministries and to those serving in less structured roles.
- **Inclusion and Visibility:** Explicitly affirm the contribution of women, men, religious and lay leaders in the mission of the Church. Encourage bishops, diocesan leadership teams and parish communities to publicly recognise and celebrate lay ministry through commissioning rites, diocesan gatherings and regular expressions of support and appreciation.
- **Sustainable Ministry Structures:** Explore sustainable funding models, employment frameworks and support structures for lay ministry and leadership roles where appropriate. Consider approaches that enable ministries to flourish while remaining responsive to local circumstances and available resources.
- **Resources and Responsibilities:** Responsibility for implementation would be shared by the National Ecclesial Council with the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, diocesan leadership teams, parish communities, formation providers and pastoral agencies. Resources required would include formation programmes, mentoring networks, commissioning and recognition materials, pastoral support systems, funding mechanisms where appropriate, and processes for ongoing evaluation and development.

Proposal 5

Title:

Piloting Co-Responsible Models for Mission and Pastoral Leadership

Description:

This proposal seeks to develop, test and evaluate new models of shared leadership, missionary outreach and co-responsible pastoral practice across the Church in Ireland. It aims to encourage innovation, experimentation and adaptation in response to changing pastoral realities while remaining rooted in the Church's mission and synodal vision. The proposal encompasses three key elements:

- (1) the development and monitoring of pilot projects and innovative ministry models;*
- (2) the phased implementation of new pastoral initiatives and practices; and*
- (3) the establishment of structures for evaluation, accountability, and shared learning.*

Rationale:

The synodal process is highlighting the need for new approaches to leadership, ministry and mission that respond creatively to contemporary social, cultural and pastoral realities. Traditional models of parish life and ministry are facing significant challenges, including changing patterns of participation, demographic shifts and reduced availability of clergy. At the same time, many communities are demonstrating creativity and resilience in developing new ways of living the Church's mission. Pilot initiatives provide opportunities to explore innovative models, learn from experience and identify effective practices before wider implementation. A culture of experimentation, evaluation and shared learning will help the Church discern sustainable pathways for renewal and growth.

Intended Impact:

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

Implementation Pathway:

- **National Level:** Establish a process for identifying, supporting (including financial) and evaluating innovative pastoral initiatives across Ireland. Encourage dioceses to participate in pilot programmes and provide mechanisms for sharing resources, expertise and learning at a national level.
- **Pilot Projects and Innovative Models:** Develop and support pilot initiatives that explore new forms of Church life and ministry, from home and abroad, including lay-led parish models, lay administration, mission parishes, chaplaincies, online ministries, regional pastoral partnerships, co-responsible ministry structures and innovative outreach projects. Encourage experimentation that is responsive to local needs while remaining aligned with the Church's mission and values.
- **Phased and Contextual Implementation:** Introduce reforms gradually through pilot programmes, consultation processes and local discernment. Recognise that dioceses and parishes differ in size, resources and pastoral circumstances, and allow flexibility in the implementation of new models while maintaining shared principles and objectives.
- **Evaluation and Shared Learning:** Establish regular reviews and evaluation processes for all pilot initiatives. Assess effectiveness, participation, sustainability, pastoral impact and opportunities for improvement. Create structures through which dioceses and parishes can share experiences, challenges and successful practices to inform future development across the Church.
- **Missionary Renewal:** Ensure that all initiatives are oriented toward missionary discipleship, evangelisation and engagement with contemporary Irish society while being aware of the wider global context. Encourage projects that move beyond the maintenance of existing structures and foster new centres of faith, community, participation and outreach, particularly among those who are marginalised or currently, disengaged groups.
- **Resources and Responsibilities:** Responsibility for implementation would be shared by a National Ecclesial Council with the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, diocesan leadership teams, pastoral councils, parish leadership teams and relevant national agencies. Resources required would include project funding, facilitation expertise, evaluation frameworks, training programmes, mentoring support, communications structures and mechanisms for disseminating learning and best practice.

4. Presentation at the National Assembly

- Reading of Statement of Discernment and Vision (800 words):
☐ Representative(s) confirmed
[Insert Name(s)]
- Presentation of Proposals:
☐ Representative(s) confirmed
[Insert Name(s)]
- Estimated Time Required:
[Insert duration]

5. Final Declaration

- We affirm that this submission is the fruit of a synodal process of listening, prayer, discernment, and consultation, undertaken in accordance with the mandate entrusted to this Working Group.
- Signed (on behalf of the Working Group):
[Name / Role]