

Limerick
Diocese



Parish Consultation Report

Changing with the Changing Times

2026



Limerick Diocese Parish Consultation Report 2026

Executive Summary

Introduction

- Over 3,000 parishioners participated in consultations across 53 of 60 parishes.
- The process aimed to identify new ways to sustain vibrant parish life amid changing times.
- The report reflects gratitude for broad participation and highlights a post-Covid renewal of mission.

The Need for Change

- The Church's core mission remains unchanged, but methods must adapt to societal shifts and declining religious practice.
- There is a pressing need to discover new ways to transmit faith, especially as traditional supports (family, society) weaken.

Three Levels of Renewal in the Church

- **Personal Interior Renewal:** Emphasises deepening personal faith and encounter with the Gospel, prayer, and spiritual formation.
- **Community Renewal:** Focuses on building supportive, inclusive parish communities where faith is lived together. The parish is not just a geographical reality.
- **Mission Reform:** Calls for a “missionary option”—adapting structures and outreach to evangelise in today's world, prioritizing outreach, human dignity, family, ecology, and justice.

Pathways for Renewal (from the Universal Synod of Bishops held in Rome in 2023-2024)

- Foster a “synodal” Church: shared decision-making, listening, and collaboration among clergy and laity.
- Establish participatory structures (councils, mission teams) for inclusive planning.
- Prioritise formation for all, especially lay ministers and youth.
- Improve transparency, accountability, and evaluation in parish operations.
- Promote ecumenical and cultural openness.

The Irish Synodal Pathway

- National consultations in Ireland (2021-2025) identified seven priorities for the Church in Ireland: Belonging, Co-responsibility & Lay Ministry, Family, Formation & Catechesis, Healing, Women, and Youth.
- The upcoming National Synodal Assembly (October 2026) will address these themes.

Limerick Diocese: Current State

- Active listening processes since the 1990's have resulted in parish clustering, new initiatives in lay and youth ministry.
- 2,000 volunteers and 17,000 weekly Mass attendees, but most are older adults.
- Clergy numbers are declining. In 1986 there were 125 priests in active ministry under 75 years of age. Today there are 33. Only one priest ordained in 10 years, with 17 international priests now serving.
- Offertory collections have dropped 37% in 10 years; financial sustainability is a concern.
- In recent years a number of new religious congregations and movements have come to the Diocese.

Main Findings from Parish Consultations

1. Faith Remains Central

- Faith is valued for spiritual support, identity, and community cohesion.
- Concerns about declining youth engagement and passing on traditions.
- The permanent diaconate, the ministry of catechist and lay ministry in general were mentioned in the consultations.

2. Youth Engagement is Urgent

- Ageing congregations and low teenage participation are major worries.
- Suggestions: youth liturgies, digital outreach, mentoring, and paid youth roles.

3. Need for New Volunteers

- Volunteer fatigue is widespread; recruitment, training, and role clarity are needed.

4. Lay Ministry and Training

- Recognition of the need of much great lay ministry. Call for clear role descriptions, structured training, and formal recognition of lay ministers.

5. Recognition of Women

- Women's contributions are vital but need greater support and training, formal recognition and leadership opportunities.

6. Inclusion and Community Outreach

- Emphasis on welcoming newcomers, supporting diversity, and using parish spaces for social activities.

7. Liturgy and Music

- Desire for joyful, accessible liturgies with diverse music and greater lay participation.

8. Communications

- Need for clear, regular communication channels and a dedicated communications person.

9. Digital Presence

- Multi-platform digital strategy recommended; livestreaming and online forms of donation to modernise engagement.

10. Sustainability of Buildings

- Rising costs and ageing infrastructure require energy efficiency and creative use of church buildings.

11. Financial Stewardship

- Transparent financial reporting and modern fundraising methods are essential.

12. Amalgamation Concerns

- Anxiety about loss of parish identity; calls for transparent, respectful reorganisation.

13. Governance and Planning

- Stronger Pastoral Unit Councils and mission teams, clear responsibilities, and succession planning are needed for resilience.

14. Innovative Ideas

- Suggestions include pop-up services, themed liturgies and community events.

15. Hope and Adaptation

- Despite challenges, there is optimism that renewal is possible through collaboration and openness to change.

Bishop's Initial Response

- Grateful for participation and recognition of faith's enduring value.
- Acknowledges the priorities and challenges outlined in the Report.
- Proposes the establishment of resource centres at the Diocesan Centre to support pastoral units and parishes: A Ministry and Leadership Support Resource Centre; A Resource and Training Resource Centre; A Digital and Communications Resource Centre; A Dignity and Hope Resource Centre; A Stewardship and Governance Resource Centre.
- Emphasises that unless more people are willing to become actively involved in the life of the parish, many of the aspirations and proposals that emerged from the parish consultations will be difficult to realise. The success of these initiatives depends not only on identifying priorities but also on the commitment of parishioners to participate in bringing them to fruition.
- Reaffirms commitment to keeping churches open where possible but stresses the need for realistic planning.
- Calls for prayer, generosity, and a spirit of renewal to sustain parish life into the future.
- Commits to responding to each individual parish with a short report summarising the parish's consultation conversations and feedback on that.

Introduction

For the past months, parishes across the Diocese have engaged in consultations around their future. They addressed two major questions:

- If we are to look creatively and with courage to the future, what new ways do we need to adopt to sustain our community so that it remains vibrant and alive?
- In light of the current reality, what is feasible for our parish?

This report summarises what emerged and some initial response on my part.

I want first and foremost to thank all who participated in any way – those who attended the parish sessions, those who looked after practical arrangements, the local clergy for their contribution and very especially the wonderful team of facilitators who guided the conversations. Some 3000 people took part. Most were in the 60+ age group but I am happy to report that a certain even if small number of young people took part in a number of the consultations. Many have commented to me on how the sessions were well run, constructive and energy-giving. There was a sense that this was a significant post-Covid re-launching of our mission.

This report will be structured under the following headings:

- A brief reflection on the need for change today.
- A presentation of the universal Church's proposal for reform and renewal on three levels and the priorities arising.
- A focus on the strategies for renewal indicated by the Universal Church.
- An overview of recent developments in the Diocese of Limerick.
- A summary of the main points that came through in the Limerick Diocese 2025-2026 Parishes Consultation.
- A letter from me as part of my initial response to what has emerged from the consultations.

Following this Report, each parish will receive a summary and feedback on its consultation. It will then be important for each parish to reflect together on practical steps it can take.

The Church is always the same, but the Church is always reforming!

The Church is always the same, the Church is always reforming. These two statements go together. The Church is the People of God, the Body of Christ, and its mission revolves around the proclamation of the Word of God, the celebration of the sacraments and the building up of the faith community. These elements are, of course, the same from century to century. But “how” we live out our faith, interacting with the Word of God, letting ourselves be shaped by the sacraments and renewing our community life and mission – all of that takes shape in new ways when there is a change in the circumstances of our world.

Today, there are major changes going on in our world. Pope Francis often highlighted that we are living not simply in an era of change but a change of era. That calls for new approaches in Church life. Pope Leo has said that “we must not delude ourselves that it is enough to carry on with a few traditional activities to maintain the vitality of our Christian communities”. Our parish life in the past was very much focused on ensuring that the sacraments were administered and the catechesis of young people was looked after. But the traditional ways of the past presupposed that faith was being transmitted by the surrounding environment, by society as well as by families. However, the cultural transformation and the changes even in how we view the human being that have taken place in recent decades tell us that this is no longer the case. On the contrary, across the Western world we are witnessing a constant erosion of religious practice. We must discover new ways of transmitting our faith.

Three Levels of Renewal

What are we to do? The Holy Spirit does not fail to help us as we try to discover new ways. The universal Church underlines three levels of renewal that are needed.

Personal Interior Renewal. On the one hand, we have to start by recharging our own spiritual battery. As Pope Leo put it, “in our life as disciples, we can always risk falling into a rut, a routine, a tendency to follow the same old pastoral plans without experiencing interior renewal and a willingness to respond to new challenges”. He went on to refer to the two great Apostles, Peter and Paul, who give us such a great example of openness to change, and a readiness to consider new approaches to evangelization in response to the problems and difficulties that arise for us today. But all of that starts with a conversion, not in the sense of a conversion from bad to good, but conversion from good to better. It means going deeper in our faith, looking out for ways to help each other take new steps on our faith journey. We need to call on the Holy Spirit to help us be inwardly renewed. Obviously, in this regard, as well as the personal life of charity that is always at the heart of faith, we need to dedicate ourselves to prayer and liturgy, contemplative formation and a striving for personal holiness.

In terms of priorities, a parish exists to offer people the possibility of a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. The desire to meet Jesus Christ as a living Person is deep within the human heart even if people can't put words on it. Young people today want authenticity. They don't want just a system of religion. They want something more personally meaningful. Pope Benedict put it well when he said: “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. ”All faith life in parishes or communities starts with the encounter with Jesus Christ. While we might disagree about this or that aspect of liturgy, parish inclusion or particular devotions, it's important to remember that the first task of any parish is enabling people to meet and know Jesus Christ who is alive.

Community Renewal. A second way we need to respond to contemporary challenges is to renew the community life of our parish or religious order or movement or Church group. There's no such thing as an individual Christian. What is distinctive about our Christian faith is that we go to God together. We help each other. We are responsible for each other's holiness. Perhaps at times in the past, we looked at the parish just in geographical terms or in terms of its structures and officers (clergy and a few lay people involved), the obligation to go to Mass and the duties of being a Catholic. It was viewed primarily as like being a member of an organisation or club.

Going to Mass was sometimes viewed as a collection of individuals each of them “re-fuelling”, as it were, at the grace station. But today, we realise we need to renew the community faith life of the parish. Some parish communities can feel tired. And yet, at a time when there are so many problems in today’s world of isolation, loneliness and polarisation, the community life of the parish is never more needed.

Building up our parish community as a faith community where people feel they belong is a clear priority. This is so not least because Jesus himself said: “By this all will know you are my disciples, if you love one another” (Jn 13:35). Saint Pope John Paul underlined the importance of the community life of the parish. He reminded us, however, that while our thoughts might run immediately to what we have to do and the actions that we feel we need to take, we need to remember we are dealing first and foremost with spirituality. We need to remember that our fellow parishioners are brothers and sisters in faith, that is, we are bound together within the profound unity of the Mystical Body of Christ. Therefore, we are part of each other. That means we need to be communities where we support each other in faith, share each other’s joys and sufferings, and attend to people’s needs, offering them deep and genuine friendship. Catechesis and spiritual formation as a community are important.

Mission Reform. A third way to respond to today’s change of era is to be open to and contribute to mission renewal. An often-quoted line from Pope Francis says, ‘I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation’. We need courage and vision to imagine new ways and new structures in our parish or pastoral unit. Again, we have to ask the Holy Spirit to lead us. While we are grateful for all our ancestors did, the profile of our clergy and of laity going to church is changing radically and rapidly. Going out in mission has to be a priority for us. Mother Teresa used to say that we shouldn’t worry about the numbers coming to Church. What matters is to help one person at a time and starting with the person next to you. To love God and to go outside ourselves to love others is the heart of Christian faith and hope.

Today the Catholic Church calls all Catholics to active evangelization. It is not easy. Pope Francis summarised what this evangelization means. It is saying to others with our lives and with our words: “Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.”

Mission today emphasises respectful dialogue with others rather than trying to impose faith. We also recognise that there are elements of truth and sanctification outside the visible Church structures and so we can cooperate with others in the common search for truth. Key priorities that shape how Catholics engage with society today include the following:

- promoting human dignity by defending life from conception to its natural end, and standing with the poor and vulnerable, the marginalised, migrants and all who might feel they are in the “periphery” of the Church and society. Promoting human dignity also includes how we use and regulate Artificial intelligence;
- valuing and supporting the family as the domestic church and promoting healthy marriages and parental responsibility;
- caring for creation as a moral duty, practicing integral ecology that hears both the cry of the poor and of the planet, and pursuing sustainable stewardship;
- global collaboration for justice, preparing a more united world for future generations.

Together these priorities guide Catholics to witness, serve, and transform society today.

Pathways for Renewal

In this section, I will draw out from the *Final Document* of the Synod of Bishops held in Rome 2023-2024 on the topic of synodality. I had the honour of attending it on behalf of the Irish Bishops Conference. The Synod was the fruit of 2 years of a universal consultative process. On the basis of feedback from all over the world, it outlined the following pathways of renewal needed today if we want the Church to be more synodal.

Conversion in how we relate to one another is a primary pathway for the Church today. It might seem obvious, but we can never take our relationships with one another for granted. We have to review and renew them always. The Church calls today for a “synodal” style of Church, that is, that we recognise that we are in this together, lay, clergy and religious, young and old and all need to sense they belong and are actively involved. We need to relate to each other by listening, making decisions together and welcoming voices that might be different. In other words, we need to “discern”, that is, to listen together to what God is saying to our diocese, our parish, our congregation, our group. This calls for a change also in traditional attitudes and practices among clergy and laity in decision-making. A synodal style is like the cultural backbone of renewal in the Church.

Participatory structures and processes. The *Final Document* promotes what it calls “participatory” bodies and clearer decision-making processes. In other words, we need structured consultative mechanisms (Finance councils, pastoral councils, mission groups). This is to ensure that lay people, young and old, religious and bishop/priests collaborate in mission planning.

Formation and empowerment of the baptised. A major pathway emphasised in the *Final Document* is a focus on formation for mission. The theme of formation was repeated often during the Synod. There needs to be a greater systematic catechesis, leadership training, and pastoral formation for lay ministers, youth, and clergy so that all can exercise their talents and charisms responsibly in the service of evangelization.

Pastoral conversion and accompaniment. The *Final Document* urges pastoral conversion. It’s not enough simply to keep things going as they were until now. We need in a new way to prioritise accompaniment of people on the margins, listening to lived experience, and engaging in concrete works of charity and justice as integral to proclamation of the Gospel. In other words, mission is to be more than handing on the contents of faith. It has to involve walking the walk as well as talking the talk.

Transparency, accountability and evaluation. It was recognised at the Synod in Rome that the dimensions of transparency, accountability and evaluation are often not as strong as they should be in Catholic parishes and bodies. There's a need to check out and evaluate how participatory bodies (pastoral unit councils, finance councils etc) are working out in our parishes and dioceses, and publish these outcomes so as to build trust and transparency.

Ecumenical and cultural openness. Finally, the *Final Document* reminds us that dialogue and collaboration with other Christian communities and other groups in civil society is a way for members of the Catholic Church to promote the Gospel message. We are called to recognise truth and goodness beyond the visible Church structures and engage in cooperative action on social and ecological issues.

The Irish Synodal Pathway

In March 2021 the Irish Bishops Conference launched a synodal pathway for Ireland. This coincided with the universal Synod on Synodality that Pope Francis announced shortly afterwards. Dioceses were invited to begin prayerful listening sessions and consultations. A national pre-synodal gathering was held in Athlone in June 2022. It gathered together the themes that emerged from consultations and conversations across the country into a national synthesis document called: *"Synthesis of the Consultation in Ireland for the Diocesan Stage of the Universal Synod 2021-2023"*. This was then forwarded to the Synod office in Rome.

Following the publication of the *Final Document* of the Roman Synod of Bishops in October 2024, the Catholic Church in Ireland moved into a further phase of local consultation and discernment and that is now leading to the holding of a National Synodal Assembly this October 2026. The October National Synodal Assembly will focus on seven main priorities and it will explore and evaluate various specific proposals relating to these priorities. The overall theme is The Living Out Of Our Baptism. The seven priorities are as follows:

Belonging. Proposals will revolve around fostering a Church of welcome, inclusion and safety so every person can find a home in community and in Christ.

Co-responsibility and Lay Ministry. Proposals will seek to further empower all the baptised, women and men, to share leadership and mission through new models of ministry and decision-making.

Family. Proposals will suggest ways to support the family as the domestic church, strengthening its role in faith transmission and its links with parishes and schools.

Formation and Catechesis. Proposals will be aimed at promoting lifelong, Christ-centred formation that is experiential and rooted in liturgy and sacramental life to equip disciples for mission.

Healing. As well as acknowledging wounds (especially those from abuse), the proposals will seek to further commit the Church in Ireland to accountability, justice and reconciliation, and ensure safe spaces for survivors.

Women. Proposals will aim at promoting greater recognition and inclusion of women's gifts and leadership at every level of Church life as a matter of justice, credibility and faithfulness.

Youth. Proposals will be about engaging young people authentically, listening to their hopes and challenges, and offering meaningful roles in leadership and mission.

Recent developments in the Diocese of Limerick

Limerick Diocese began a listening process back in the 1990's. Since then, it has been active in promoting clustering of parishes and reduced the number of Masses in order to enhance the quality of the liturgy. A youth ministry has been developed. There have been many pastoral initiatives – the pastoral certificate in lay ministry, new lay-led, baptismal teams, lay funeral ministries, and countless local initiatives. Many other aspects have developed across the Diocese such as greater safeguarding standards and tighter financial oversight.

In 2016 a Diocesan Synod was held. It made proposals about how to foster parishes as communities of belonging, develop faith formation, enhance the celebration of the liturgy, support family life and mission, promote greater youth ministry. In particular, the Synod promoted a focus on parishes working together in pastoral units with each unit having a pastoral council, priests working in team ministry and each parish having a mission team. The 2016 Synod led to a pastoral plan *Moving Forward Together In Hope: A Limerick Diocesan Plan* and diocesan statutes were published. A certain amount has been achieved under each of headings indicated at the Synod and yet there is still much to do. The Covid pandemic impacted negatively on initial developments.

A positive development in the years since 2016 has been the arrival of new religious orders that have brought new missionary zeal: the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia; the Alma Mercy Sisters; the Congregation of the Sons of Mary Mother of Mercy; the Camillian Fathers. New movements and groups have grown such as the Neo-Catechumenal Way and Youth 2000. There are a number of small but promising youth groups in the Diocese. Young people are enthusiastic about taking part in the “Anois” programme for Transition year students, the Lourdes pilgrimage and the summer camp experience in West Kerry. Parishes have developed interesting initiatives such as organising parish retreats, walks, parties for senior citizens, environmental-friendly actions inspired by Pope Francis’ encyclical on the care of the planet, *Laudato Si’*.

In looking to the future, I published an “*Overview 2023*” for the Diocese that aimed to provide a snapshot of the life of the Diocese under each of the headings of the 2016 Diocesan Synod. The “*Overview*” also provided statistics of where things are at today in terms of the profile of clergy, financial arrangements and challenges facing us in the Diocese. It is indeed important to know what resources we have or don’t have. In early 2025 I produced the “*Diocese of Limerick Mission Report 2024*” that provided further statistical overview as well short summaries of missionary aspects of the Diocese structured around the key themes of the 2016 Limerick Synod.

We can be grateful that we have lay people committed to their parish. There are some 2000 volunteers working across the Diocese. We have many very fine sacristans and parish secretaries. Currently, almost 17,000 attend Mass weekly across the Diocese. We know, however, that the profile of those attending Church is in the older bracket, even if there are some small signs of an increase in the number of young adults attending. Today we have 33 native Limerick priests under 75 in fulltime active ministry. In 1986 there were 125 priests in active ministry under 75 years of age. This year we will have one seminarian beginning his studies for the priesthood. One priest has been ordained in 10 years. We now have 17 International priests serving the Diocese. In terms of finance, it is significant to note that the offertory collection in the diocese, despite a slight increase post-Covid, has reduced overall by 37% in 10 years. Those contributing regularly is only a fraction of the overall Catholic community. The recent survey on the patronage of schools has indicated an overall robust desire to remain with religious denominational patronage.

The Limerick Diocese 2025-2026 Parish Consultations

Following the consultative approach recommended by the 2024 *Final Document* and having gone around the Diocese meeting with members of Pastoral Unit Councils and others in late 2023, I launched in Autumn 2025 an initiative encouraging individual parishes to engage in their own reflection on the future of their parish. Across the Diocese some 3000 people attended in 53 out of the 60 parishes. The parish consultations showed there is energy among parishioners who care deeply about the future of their communities. The following are the main points that emerged. Inevitably there is a certain overlapping and repetition as some points were relevant to a number of topics that were discussed.

Main Points Raised

1.The Importance of Faith. Faith remains central to many parishioners, yet many worry about keeping it vibrant in community life and passing it on. It was noted that faith is evident in christenings, funerals and anniversary Masses but needs active encouragement for occasional attendees. Parishioners value their faith as practical wisdom providing spiritual support and hope, resilience and comfort at times of loss. They see faith as the social glue binding families, schools and neighbourhoods, shaping identity, belonging and shared values. The contribution of faith to cultural heritage was often mentioned. Intergenerational transmission of the faith was emphasised, with older parishioners and grandparents seen as central to handing on traditions. People want worship and parish life to feel joyful, meaningful and relevant, seeking renewed spiritual energy rather than maintenance. Concerns include declining parental attendance, reduced religious instruction and youth disengagement, a certain disconnect between parish and local community activities yet communities remain determined to preserve and transmit faith. In this context, a number of consultations raised the issue of the permanent diaconate, the ministry of catechist and lay ministry in general."

2.Outreach to Young a Priority. Young people emerged across the parish consultations as the single most urgent priority for parish life. Communities reported ageing congregations, low teenage participation and fear that vitality will wane without action. Parishioners want young people actively involved: serving at the altar (there were repeated calls for altar servers), reading, leading music and taking roles in youth Masses, liturgies. Schools were said to be vital partners; sacramental preparation should include parents, reinforcing the conviction that faith begins at home. Practical barriers were noted including competing weekend activities, unclear pathways into lay youth ministry and limited training or mentoring for youth leaders. Suggestions for ways forward included a rota of youth-centred liturgies, monthly youth masses, youth groups, youth pilgrimages, retreats, Transition Year parish projects and testimony evenings. Digital outreach—social media, videos and targeted messaging—was emphasised to meet young people where they are. Some of the parish consultations suggested skills surveys, "open nights", young volunteer mentoring and modestly paid roles such as youth coordinator or digital officer to help sustain programmes for young people. The appointment of lay parish chaplains in parishes to prepare children for the sacraments was proposed by some.

People want to invest in training, opportunities and welcoming liturgies so the next generation feels ownership and parish life can thrive. During the consultations some spoke of the importance of the Diocesan Muintearas Íosa community and some referred to the example of Saint Carlo Acutis.

3.The need for new blood. The parish consultations repeatedly noted how congregations are ageing and the shortage of under-30s, with volunteer tiredness a pressing concern. Long-serving parishioners report tiredness from carrying essential tasks—finance, cleaning, flower arranging, sacramental preparation and administration—while replacements are not visible. Reliance on a shrinking volunteer pool creates fragility: when a few step back, activities and services falter. Practical suggestions included the mapping of roles and skills needed, publishing responsibility rosters, and targeted recruitment through open nights. Emphasis was placed on training and mentoring via accredited short courses, shadowing and clear role descriptions to value new volunteers. Realistic time commitments, delegation, rotating duties and possibly paid posts for key functions might help to reduce workload. The need for wellbeing support was flagged. This could be through recognition “thank-you” events, shared administration, the piloting of recruitment initiatives and encouraging training cycles. Pairing new volunteers with mentors and advertising time-limited tasks might attract those unable to commit long term. It was suggested that matching role demands to volunteers’ availability and life stages could broaden the volunteer base. In the course of the consultations recruitment of priests from abroad was welcomed.

4.A call for clarity of roles and for lay training. There was broad agreement across the consultations that parishes must actively encourage and expand lay ministry so that communities can function confidently as clergy numbers change. Examples were given of places where lay involvement has radically changed a parish. At the consultations described a fragmented pattern of informal responsibilities in the areas of sacramental preparation, liturgy leadership, funeral and baptism teams, administration and digital communication. These and other tasks are carried out by committed volunteers but often without training, clear role descriptions or succession plans. That gap creates uncertainty about who may legitimately lead particular ministries, and leaves volunteers feeling underprepared and unsupported.

A structured, practical approach was proposed: agreed role descriptions, a published list of ministers and duties, and accessible training pathways so that lay people can step into liturgical, pastoral and administrative tasks with clarity and confidence.

It was suggested that defining tasks with specific hours, frequency and duration, and advertising time-limited roles attracts those unable to commit long-term. Practical proposals included short, accredited courses, diocesan workshops for catechesis and liturgy, shadowing and mentoring schemes, and local “how-to” sessions for specific tasks such as reading, leading prayer and preparing children for sacraments. Several groups recommended formal recognition—certificates, public acknowledgement and commissioning at Mass—to validate lay ministry and reassure congregations about standards. Many suggested pilot programmes and shared training across pastoral units to pool resources and ensure consistency.

5. Clearer recognition of the contribution of Women. Consultations repeatedly recognised women’s vital contribution to parish life and called for clearer support, recognition and pathways for fuller participation. Women serve centrally in catechesis, sacramental preparation, administration, pastoral visiting and music, yet their work often lacks formal training, visible commissioning and equitable leadership representation. Practical barriers include childcare and family commitments, informal role allocation that over-stretches the contribution of some women, unclear role descriptions and limited access to accredited formation. Proposed responses emphasised targeted formation, mentoring and shadowing, flexible micro-roles, clear role descriptions and modest paid posts. Participants urged stronger representation of women on parish councils and finance committees, and recommended women-led liturgies, themed events and leadership retreats to nurture confidence and vocation. Requests included senior lay roles for women, greater visibility in governance and inclusion in liturgical and pastoral responsibilities. In a number of places, submissions raised questions about ordination to the diaconate and priesthood and married clergy as topics for further discussion.

6.A stress on inclusion and community outreach. Inclusion and community outreach were highlighted as essential to revitalising parish life, urging parishes to become genuinely welcoming hubs serving the whole neighbourhood. Parishioners discussed welcoming newcomers, involving different nationalities and communities, reaching isolated parishioners, supporting older people, and ensuring that all voices are heard within Church life. There was strong emphasis on listening, hospitality, and creating environments where people feel accepted and valued. Parishioners recommended practical welcome measures—targeted invitations, newcomer events, multilingual signage and culturally sensitive outreach—to help people from diverse backgrounds feel seen and able to contribute. Using church buildings for low-pressure social activities such as coffee mornings, concerts, workshops and community meetings was proposed by some to foster relationships outside worship. Personal greetings, hospitality after Mass (tea/coffee once a month) and parish social gatherings were repeatedly valued. Quick matching of newcomers to meaningful roles through micro-tasks, clear role descriptions and short induction or mentoring was urged to aid retention. Digital outreach and better promotion—parish websites, social media and WhatsApp groups—were emphasised to publicise events and share stories that make the parish feel accessible. Another way to reach out to people is to continue to promote Irish culture and traditions e.g. St. Brigid’s Day.

7.Focus on Liturgy and Music. Consultations identified liturgy and music as central to making Mass welcoming, meaningful and attractive, especially for families and young people. Parishioners want joyful, accessible Masses with shorter, clearer homilies and music that bridges generations. Among the various suggestions, there were calls for children’s liturgy, family Masses and youth choirs linked to schools so young people might actively participate. Some groups recommended diversifying musical styles—traditional hymns alongside contemporary, folk or Taizé elements—to reflect varied tastes and foster prayerful engagement. Practical proposals included recruiting and training musicians and cantors, forming choir rotas, and running workshops for readers and servers so liturgy is well prepared and confidently led. Some people encouraged greater lay-led liturgies and defined roles for those assisting when a priest is unavailable, with training and commissioning to reassure congregations.

Emphasis was placed on planning liturgies in advance, involving schools and families in readings and offertory, using music that resonates with the liturgical seasons, and experimenting with themed or youth-led liturgies to attract more attendees. The use of Irish in liturgy was also mentioned.

8.Improve Communications. The consultations made clear that effective communication is central to parish life and essential for connecting parishioners, building trust and mobilising volunteers. People called for a single trusted source of information—clear, regular channels that publish Mass times, news of parish events, financial updates and volunteer needs—and for newsletters, noticeboards and personal outreach (perhaps by parish App or e-mail etc.) that include older parishioners. Training and a named communications person in the parish or pastoral unit were recommended. Other steps proposed included a skills audit to identify people with communications experience, a short communications plan with key messages and responsibilities, and simple pilot initiatives to test approaches and show quick wins. A good practice mentioned was a remembrance mass which showed a video of photos of people who had passed away in the parish in the past year.

9.Digital Presence. Many of the parish consultations emphasised strengthening parish digital presence to support mission and community. Parishioners recommended a pragmatic multi-platform strategy: a maintained parish website as the authoritative hub, complemented by Facebook, Instagram and TikTok to reach different age groups, and WhatsApp for local coordination. Livestreaming and big-screen links were proposed to include those unable to attend, while simple digital giving—online donations, tap machines and standing orders—would modernise collections. Several groups suggested modest paid support or a small team to manage channels, volunteer training, and a three-month pilot for livestreaming or an App. Emphasis was placed on low-cost, reliable tools, clear governance and inclusive practices so digital communication strengthens rather than replaces personal contact, improves accessibility, promotes events and stories, and helps parishes engage across generations. This widens participation and sustains parish life locally.

10. Sustainability. Church buildings, maintenance and sustainability. The parish consultations repeatedly flagged the issue of the upkeep of church buildings as a practical and strategic priority. Participants emphasised that rising running costs and ageing fabric make energy efficiency urgent: “Church buildings need to become more energy efficient and sustainable to reduce running costs → solar panels, insulation etc.” At the same time, some people urged parishes to make better use of their buildings for community life – coffee mornings, concerts, meetings and other activities – so churches could become hubs rather than under-used assets. Practical concerns included heating bills, insulation, lighting, seating comfort and basic maintenance. Some are concerned that without investment costs will increasingly divert funds from ministry. Several groups recommended pursuing grants and diocesan support for retrofits (insulation, LED lighting, solar) and suggested energy audits as a first step.

11. Responsible Stewardship. Finance, fundraising and transparency were recurring concerns, with clear financial stewardship seen as essential to trust, participation and sustaining buildings and ministries. Parishioners asked for straightforward, accessible accounts and regular reporting so communities understand income, expenditure and the rationale for appeals. Practical proposals included publishing annual accounts, simple budget summaries in newsletters and noticeboards, and explaining maintenance priorities before launching appeals. Targeted fundraising for specific projects, realistic costings, timelines and progress updates were recommended to demonstrate impact. Some of the consultations urged exploring modest income generation from building use, grant applications and shared pastoral unit resources to ease pressure on weekly collections. Digital giving—online donations, tap machines and standing orders—would modernise income streams. Transparency was emphasised: visible use of funds encourages financial contributions. Training for finance committees, clearer governance, a named finance contact and measures to reduce volunteer overload were suggested. Several submissions recommended renaming “Dues” to “Priests Offering” to reflect purpose and improve clarity.

12. Amalgamation. Parish consultations expressed anxiety that amalgamation or pastoral reorganisation could erode local parish identity, community bonds and traditions. Some parishioners feared merging churches could dilute ownership of their church, weaken local rituals and reduce informal pastoral care. Many recognised that administrative consolidation is needed but this must happen in a way that preserves local worship, festivals and decision-making so each community retains a distinct voice. Concerns included loss of customs, reduced visibility of lay leaders, and the inconvenience of travelling farther for Mass or funerals. In some parishes, parishioners asked for transparent planning, meaningful consultation and guarantees that buildings remain open for key services and community events. Proposed measures for greater parish co-operation included rotating Mass schedules, shared administrative services, and the promotion of the pastoral unit structure and the pooling of resources. People accept some structural change is necessary but want it managed to respect history, sustain local relationships and keep parish life rooted in place. Clear communication, local safeguards and arrangements were essential to maintain cohesion. Some parishes were open to exploring further the possibilities of amalgamation with the neighbouring parish/es.

13. Governance, structures and pastoral planning. Consultations highlighted governance, structures and planning as foundations for resilient parish life, calling for clarity, accountability and reorganisation. Parishioners want transparent decision-making and clear lines of responsibility so that they understand who authorises ministries, manages finances and oversees buildings. Many recommended strengthening parish councils, finance committees and pastoral teams with defined remits, published terms of reference and named contacts to reduce confusion and volunteer overload. Pooling administrative functions across pastoral units—shared secretarial support, joint maintenance planning and rotas—would achieve economies of scale and free volunteers for ministry. Succession planning was emphasised: explicit role descriptions, handover procedures and mentoring to enable confident lay leadership when clergy or long-serving volunteers change. People urged formalised lay ministry governance with commissioning, accountability pathways and training to reassure congregations. Measures suggested included governance manuals, annual reviews, pilot projects and strategic plans with timelines and measurable outcomes.

Consultation, representation and financial governance were seen as essential to any reorganisation. Safeguarding, data protection and compliance were also highlighted as non-negotiable elements of any new structure.

14. Some interesting minority suggestions. Consultations offered a range of experimental, locally piloted ideas to revitalise parish life. Suggestions included pop-up services in cafés and parks, seasonal or themed liturgies (film-inspired, environmental, arts-focused), micro-church cells and home-based faith groups as alternatives to larger structures. Proposals also featured barter-style volunteering (people offering services or items, for example, gardening, bookkeeping, or training, in return for other services or community benefits rather than a wage) and parish time-banks to exchange skills and tasks, interfaith community projects, experimental worship times (late evening or weekday family services), pop-up cafés or social enterprises to fund outreach and provide training, and artistic residencies or commissions to engage creative and younger audiences. Practical community events were suggested: Advent wreath and St Brigid's cross workshops, after-Mass socials every few months, summer faith camps, and occasional special Masses for sports organisations. Several parishes proposed monthly afternoon Masses for those with mobility or health challenges, supported by lay assistants. Ideas such as youth pilgrimages, themed liturgies, and short pilot projects were seen as low-risk experiments to test appeal. A tour of the "12 Churches of Easter" was suggested. While not universally endorsed, these creative options were valued as innovative pilots that could attract new participants, strengthen community ties and diversify parish outreach.

15. Hope, Adaptation and Future Sustainability. Despite concerns regarding declining attendance, ageing populations, and changing social realities, the consultations consistently reflected hope and optimism for the future. Participants acknowledged that change is inevitable but believed parish life can remain vibrant through adaptation, collaboration, stronger participation, and renewed focus on mission and community. Across the consultations there was a recurring belief that renewal is possible if parishes remain open to change while preserving the core values of faith, worship, and community belonging.

An Initial Response from Bishop Brendan Leahy

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

I express my sincere gratitude to all who took part in the parish consultations. You now have the Report with a summary of the findings to read and reflect upon. This marks another step on our diocesan journey as we mark the 10th anniversary of the Diocesan Synod of 2016. The Holy Spirit is urging the whole Church to walk the path of consultation, listening, and shared planning. The Diocese of Limerick has adapted this approach now for many years. At times the process may feel slow, but we know the saying: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." The parish consultations are an important moment of looking to the future together.

There is much to give thanks for. Faith still remains a living source of hope, identity, and belonging. People express a strong desire to hand on the faith. While challenges were named, there is clear evidence of creativity, generosity, and openness to new approaches, including digital tools for outreach.

The Report highlights key challenges and priorities. I have begun preparing short summaries for each parish and will share them soon. Meanwhile, I encourage everyone to reflect on the general findings and discern local steps. Some actions can begin immediately; others will require planning, cooperation, and collaboration across pastoral units.

By way of an initial response to the consultations, I intend to establish a number of resource centres at the Diocesan Centre, each at the service of pastoral units and parishes across the Diocese:

A Ministry and Leadership Support Resource Centre tasked with assisting in the promotion throughout the Diocese of the development of participatory bodies (Pastoral Unit Councils and local Parish Mission teams) as well as encouraging lay ministries, including women's leadership, with public recognition. It will provide templates and guidelines for various ministries and roles. It will also develop mechanisms for greater regular evaluation processes for ministries and roles.

A Resource and Training Resource Centre tasked with providing in a co-ordinated manner the provision of formation, training and resources in the areas of parish pastoral ministries and faith formation, liturgy and youth ministry as well as resources that support the family as the domestic church. This hub will provide theological, spiritual and practical formation of those involved in ministries such as funeral ministry and baptismal teams.

A Digital and Communications Resource Centre tasked with developing and resourcing the diocesan and parish missionary focus in the digital environment and in communications in general. It will assist in strengthening parish digital presence to support mission and community.

A Dignity and Hope Resource Centre tasked with fostering a Church of welcome, inclusion and safety, resourcing parishes in listening, hospitality, and creating environments where people feel accepted and valued. It will liaise with other bodies engaged in social outreach in the Diocese. It will explore the creation of a ministry of listening and accompaniment for those on the margins.

A Stewardship and Governance Resource Centre will assist parishes in implementing their financial, stewardship and governance obligations. It will assist parishes in preparing an annual Parish Report Day on parish finances and mission.

I hope our Diocese can continue developing new ministries, including the ministry of catechist, the permanent diaconate, and roles such as coordinators of small communities and parish administrators. To that end, I invite expressions of interest in these ministries.

At the same time, we must be honest about the challenges before us. Many excellent proposals emerged, but they come at a moment when clergy and parishioners are ageing, and the pool of volunteers is smaller than before. We cannot keep asking the same faithful people to take on more; this was clear throughout the consultations. Unless more people are willing to become actively involved in the life of the parish, many of the aspirations and proposals that emerged from the parish

consultations will be difficult to realise. The success of these initiatives depends not only on identifying priorities but also on the commitment of parishioners to participate in bringing them to fruition. The call for greater lay involvement is not abstract but urgent. Parishioners wisely noted that practical, time-limited roles and clear training will help more people participate.

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Renewal will require deeper parish collaboration, shared resources, and a willingness for people to work together across parishes in Pastoral Units so that we can provide ministries that will sustain parish life into the future.

The financial situation is the elephant in the room. Some parishes are now in a precarious position. Running a parish or maintaining church buildings carries real costs. I know how deeply people cherish their parish church, and I share that love. I do not intend to close churches unless a parish can no longer keep a building open financially or in terms of health and safety. We are not at that point, (though in one or two cases we are near it), but we must face the truth with courage. We need to prepare now for the next decade, so we do not leave a heavy burden for others. Tough decisions may have to be taken, but it is important that parishioners themselves be proactive in future planning.

The continuing mission and sustainability of a parish require more than keeping a church building open. I welcome the willingness of parishes to collaborate more within their Pastoral Unit, and some are even open to amalgamation. Parish identity does not disappear when communities pool resources or work more closely together; in fact, collaboration may be what allows it to endure. I cannot emphasise enough the urgent need for smaller parishes to deepen collaboration with their neighbours for a sustainable future.

I invite you to read the Report, reflect on it, talk together about it and consider how you might contribute to the renewal of your parish and pastoral unit. We remember, of course, that the future of our Diocese will not be shaped by structures alone but, as I mentioned in the first part of the Report, by renewal in our faith and prayer, our generosity and community spirit shaped by the New Commandment, “love one another as I have loved you”.

May Mary, Mother of the Church, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, accompany us on the path of renewal.

With every blessing,

+ Brendan Leahy

Bishop of Limerick.



**Limerick
Diocese**

2026