

YOUTH FAMILY AND FAITH



**DIOCESAN CONGRESS
PREPARATORY MATERIALS**

March 2026



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CONGRESS PRAYER

God our Father

We your people, take time to be still and to bid ourselves to pray, listen and learn.

In the stillness of our searching, you remind us that all journeys of faith begin in your Word ... “Love one another as I have loved you”.

And so, Father, through you, with you and in you, full of love and respect for each other and all you have created, we go forward renewed as pilgrims of hope.

With hearts full of hope and anticipation, we your people in the Archdiocese of Armagh pray for your blessing and guidance for our Congress on Youth, Family and Faith.

As we strive to meet the pastoral needs of the young in our faith community at this time and in this place, send your Holy Spirit to inspire and guide us.

May this Congress, empower our youth in their faith journeys, strengthen their families of origin and foster deeper encounters with your love and grace.

Through our prayer and dialogue, let us grow in understanding of our calling as your people and align our plans with your divine will.

May we be a Church of families living and working for justice, peace and love in the world.

We ask this through the intercession of the saints of Armagh, Patrick, Brigid, Malachy and Oliver and the protection of our blessed mother Mary.

We have God’s work to do. So, rise, let us be on our way.

Amen



DIOCESAN CONGRESS

An Introductory Message from Archbishop Eamon Martin

Dear Friends in Christ,

It gives me great joy to welcome you as delegates preparing for our Archdiocesan Congress on Youth, Family and Faith, which will take place from 20th – 22nd March 2026. I am deeply grateful to each one of you for your commitment to our process and your willingness to take part in this important moment in the life of the Archdiocese of Armagh.

Over the past number of years, the Archdiocese of Armagh has been engaged in a special journey of prayer, listening and discernment that has been part of our diocesan and universal synodal processes. People from across our parishes, schools and communities have generously shared their experience of faith, their hopes for the future and their desire to see the Church renewed in our time. The proposals outlined in this preparatory document arise from that shared journey, and I am grateful to all who have contributed to the process.

This Congress comes at a particularly significant moment. In 2032 the Church in Ireland will mark the 1600th anniversary of the arrival of Saint Patrick to these shores. As the faith community most closely associated with Saint Patrick, we, here in the Archdiocese of Armagh are invited to reflect on what his missionary spirit and zeal might mean for us today.

St. Patrick's story begins not with success but with vulnerability. As a young boy he was taken into slavery and brought to Ireland. In that time of hardship his faith deepened, and through prayer he came to know God's presence in new and powerful ways. When he eventually returned to his homeland, Patrick later felt called to come back to Ireland, not as a slave but as a missionary, bringing the hope and light of the Gospel to a people and culture he had once feared.

In many ways, we too are called to rediscover that same missionary courage. We face a rapidly changing society and a culture where faith can no longer be taken for granted. Yet St. Patrick's witness reminds us that the Gospel can still take root in every age and culture when it is lived with authenticity, humility and hope.

For this reason, the focus of this Congress on Youth, Family and Faith is both timely and essential. The future of the Church will depend greatly on how we nurture and accompany young people, how we support family life, and how readily our parishes can become communities where faith cannot just grow but flourish.

I encourage each of you to take time to reflect prayerfully on the proposals contained in this document and to begin considering how they might become a reality in the life of our Archdiocese. As we gather together for our Congress, your insights, experience and faith will be essential as we seek to discern the path ahead.

My own hope is that this Congress will help us move forward together with renewed confidence and that it will shape a vision for the Church in the Archdiocese of Armagh that will guide us in the years leading towards the Patrician Year of 2032 and beyond.

May the example of Saint Patrick and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, inspire us in this task and may we be encouraged by that same Spirit during our time together.

Every blessing on you all,

+ Eamon Martin

✠ **Eamon Martin**
Archbishop of Armagh, Primate of All Ireland

The Importance of Youth and Family Ministry and the Risks if we Fail to Resource It!

by Bishop Michael Router

Youth and family ministry is essential because it addresses a growing and urgent reality – the widening disconnect between people, especially the young, and parish life. Many young people and families are not absent because they have lost faith, but because they no longer feel they belong. Rebuilding that sense of belonging is one of the most pressing pastoral challenges we face today.

The importance of young people and families lies in the fact that they are a source of energy and life. Their presence calls the Church to greater courage and to more positive action in living the Gospel. They strengthen the whole community and ensure that faith is lived and shared in each generation.

If we as a Church do not meaningfully engage with those under 35 then there may not be a viable Church in 30 to 40 years' time. The alternative is bleak. We will find ourselves with an increasing number of communities where the faith is no longer actively practiced or passed on and Churches may have to close or become offices, theatres or restaurants.

This reality, unfortunately, is not always fully recognised or appreciated. For those involved in youth ministry it can feel like they are in the midst of a crisis while others continue as though nothing has changed. Sticking our heads in the sand or maintaining familiar or habitual patterns of work may feel comfortable, but it is no longer sufficient for the challenges that lie before us.

At present, there are approximately 85,000 young people aged 14–35 in the Archdiocese of Armagh. Reaching even a fraction of them requires a significant, coordinated effort from the whole Church. This includes not only commitment but also real investment. A half-hearted approach to resourcing youth and family ministry will not succeed. Instead, it will simply hasten decline and make renewal more difficult in the future.

The need for action becomes even clearer when we consider projected clergy numbers. Today, 73 Armagh diocesan priests under the age of 75 and 15 permanent deacons, work across 61 parishes. However, within 20 years, the number of clergy in active ministry could fall dramatically. From the current cohort, only 27 priests and 2 deacons will remain under the age of 75. Even with an optimistic projection of 20 newly ordained priests and 12 new deacons, the diocese in 2046 could have just 47 priests and 14 deacons, serving all of the parishes.

These figures point to a fundamental shift in how we operate. The future of the Church cannot rely on clergy alone. A deeper culture of co-responsibility between priests and lay people is essential. Lay leadership, properly formed and supported, must play a central role in pastoral life, particularly in accompanying young people and families.

Youth and family ministry is key to this renewal. It offers accompaniment, formation and a welcoming community to young people helping them to deepen their relationship with Christ and remain connected to the Church. Without such support, many of them will continue to drift away.

So, one thing is certain. This is not a time for business as usual. We are not called to preserve structures that are no longer effective for the sake of it. If we do then we will turn our Church into a museum gathering dust. We have to try, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to reimagine how we live and share the faith each day. This will require courage and creativity and a willingness to invest significant resources – human, spiritual and financial.

Recent Church teaching reinforces this direction of travel for dioceses and parishes. Key documents, such as *Episcopalis Communio* (2018), the *Final Document of the Synod on Synodality* (2024), *Praedicate Evangelium* (2022) and Pope Leo XIV's most recent *Motu Proprio, Coniuncta cura* (2025), emphasise that governance and financial management must serve the Church's pastoral mission. This calls for transparency and collaboration in decision, making, ensuring that resources are aligned with what should truly matter in the Church – the proclamation of the Gospel and the building of vibrant communities of faith.

In practical terms, this means embedding synodal accountability and co-responsibility into diocesan and parish structures. Financial prudence remains important, but it must support, not overshadow, the life and mission of the Church. Investment in youth and family ministry is not an optional or luxury expense, but a necessary commitment to the future.

The choice before us is clear. We can continue with limited investment in terms of effort, personnel or resources and face gradual decline, or we can act decisively, strengthening and supporting families, forming young disciples and training both clergy and laity to share responsibility for the Church's mission.

Youth and family ministry is not simply one priority among many. It is central to renewal. By investing in it now, we can help guarantee the existence of a living, missionary Church for generations to come, one where young people encounter the transforming love of Jesus Christ and find a true home in the community of faith.



Story of the Process so Far

The journey towards the Diocesan Congress on Youth, Family and Faith has unfolded over the past eight months as a sustained process of listening, reflection and discernment across the Archdiocese of Armagh. Throughout 2025 and into early 2026, parishes, schools, families, young people, clergy and lay leaders participated in gatherings, consultations and local conversations. These gatherings created space for people to speak honestly about their experience of faith, express their hopes for the Church, and in turn acknowledge the challenges facing parish life today.

From this shared listening, a clear pattern emerged and across different contexts and communities, common themes were named. These themes were carefully gathered, prayerfully reflected upon, and shaped into six key priorities for the future life and mission of the Church in this Archdiocese. The priorities are not abstract ideas or theoretical proposals as they have grown directly from the lived faith, experience and prayerful discernment of our people.

They reflect a deep desire for genuine belonging within the Church, a belonging rooted in faith and linked to a growing willingness to take part more fully in the Church's life and mission. Before the February gatherings, which were organised to test the emerging priorities, delegates received preparatory materials. These included short audio reflections to help them pray and reflect in advance.

Delegates were invited not simply to read proposals, but to enter into real discernment and to notice what resonated, what challenged them, and where the Holy Spirit might be calling the Archdiocese of Armagh to renewal.

The priorities presented in this document reflect a journey many people of deep faith know well. It begins with a desire to belong in parish, school and family life and grows through prayer, learning and taking part in the liturgy. Over time, it leads to reaching out to others in service and mission. In this way, the priorities proposed to our Congress on Youth, Family and Faith assembly are not just pastoral plans but describe a real path of growth in Christian discipleship and how we might grow this path in the Archdiocese of Armagh.

Each priority in this document is accompanied by practical proposals for action. These proposals are part of a wider vision rooted in Baptism (explored further in Section Six). Through Baptism, every Christian shares in the life and mission of the Church. Participation, therefore, is not simply about the tasks we perform, but about the shared responsibility that flows from our baptismal calling.

Since January 2020, the Archdiocese of Armagh has been engaged in prayer, listening and careful reflection about the future of our Church. The fruits of that journey now bring us to an important moment: moving from conversation to action as we gather for the Congress in March 2026.

As we take this next step, we are encouraged to look beyond simply adding new programmes or organising more events. Instead, we are invited to think more deeply about how we can support strong leadership, better collaboration and meaningful formation so that people of all ages can continue to grow in faith throughout their lives.

The Congress is therefore not simply about choosing initiatives, but about discerning how the Church today is called to renew her mission, to witness to Christ and share the hope of the Gospel in our own time and place. Each delegate is therefore invited to work towards building communities that live the faith with confidence, share responsibility for mission, and respond with courage to the needs of those around us.

Baptism, Discipleship and Mission

A Glossary of Terms Used in this Document

Renewal Begins with the Baptised Community

The proposals presented to this Congress arise from a simple conviction: the Church is renewed not primarily by structures but by a people who rediscover who they are in Christ. Before we speak of plans, ministries or pastoral priorities, we must return to the source of our common life, Baptism and seek to foster greater understanding of what our Baptism does to us, what it calls us to do and what we are become as baptised persons.

The Church is not first an organisation or a collection of activities. She is a people called by God, gathered in Christ and sent into the world. Every proposal in this document should therefore be read in light of the baptismal identity we share.

Baptism: Entrance into a Living People

Baptism is the sacrament through which we are incorporated or integrated into Christ and into his Body, the Church. Through it we are forgiven, filled with the Holy Spirit and welcomed into a living communion that spans generations and cultures. Baptism is not a private spiritual experience or event but entry into a pilgrim people who walk together in faith.

Because of Baptism, no Christian stands outside the life or mission of the Church. Each belongs. Each is called. Each is sent! Baptism is therefore not something that happened in the past, it is something that forms the foundation of who we are, God's People together and a reality we must live out each day.

A Shared Dignity and Vocation

Through Baptism all the faithful, lay, religious, ordained, share a common dignity. This dignity does not erase the differences of each vocation and call but precedes them. Before there are ministries, offices or roles, there is the shared identity of being God's people.

The Church teaches that all the baptised participate in Christ's priestly, prophetic and kingly mission. This participation is expressed in many ways: in prayer, in witness, in service, in leadership, in teaching, in charity and in daily fidelity. The ordained priesthood, distinct in its sacramental character, serves this common baptismal vocation and strengthens it through Word and Sacrament.

When the Congress speaks of shared responsibility, it does so on this foundation: the Church's life is carried not by the ordained or by a few but by the whole body of Christ, each according to their unique gifts and specific calling from God.

Discipleship as a Lifelong Journey

To be baptised is to begin a journey of discipleship. A disciple is one who listens to Christ, learns from him and follows him in daily life. Discipleship is not limited to childhood preparation for sacraments or to particular roles or functions in the Church. It is a lifelong process of conversion and growth.

The proposals before the Congress seek to move us from isolated events and sacramental moments to sustained formation in faith. They recognise that the People of God are always on pilgrimage and always in need of deeper encounter with Christ.

Communion: More Than Just Relationship or Hospitality

Belonging within the Church is not simply a matter of offering a warm welcome or creating social connection. It is rooted in communion, that is a shared participation in the life of the Trinity made visible and real through the life of the parish and the community of believers in it.

Communion means walking together in faith, worshiping together and offering God's love to those most marginalised in our communities and in society. It means listening to one another, discerning together the needs of our community and supporting one another's vocation. When the proposals call for stronger belonging, they aim to build this deeper communion, where each person is recognised as a valued member of the body.

Participation: From Interior Faith to Shared Responsibility

Participation in the Church is first interior. It begins in faith, in prayer and in conscious engagement with scripture the liturgy. From this interior participation flows visible and active involvement in the life of the parish and pastoral area. The Church's teaching on participation invites all the baptised to engage actively in the Eucharist and the broader life of the Church, not merely as observers but as those who offer themselves with Christ. Ministries and leadership roles grow out of this spiritual participation.

When the Congress encourages the development of lay ministries, catechetical teams or liturgical leadership groups, it does so not to create additional burdens but to enable the People of God to live more fully the responsibility already given to them in Baptism.

Mission: A People Sent

The Church exists not for self-preservation but for mission. From the moment of Baptism, Christians are sent into the world as witnesses to Christ. Mission includes teaching the faith, serving those in need, inviting others into communion and bringing the light of the Gospel into every sphere of life. Mission therefore is not the task of a specialised few but the vocation of the whole community. The proposals relating to youth, family and faith are concrete expressions of this shared missionary calling.

The Domestic Church: Faith Lived in Daily Life

Within the People of God, the family holds a unique and special place. The home is often the first school of faith and the first experience of belonging to the Church. Parents and grandparents play an essential role in handing on the faith, not as substitutes for the parish but as the primary nurturers of faith and partners within a shared mission. When the Congress emphasises family-centred formation and prayer in the home, it seeks to strengthen this living network of relationships through which faith is transmitted and sustained.

Catechesis: Forming a Mature People

Catechesis is the ongoing formation of the People of God. It introduces believers more deeply into the mystery of Christ and into the life of the Church. Catechesis is not confined to childhood but accompanies every baptised Catholic through each stage of life. A synodal Church recognises that formation cannot depend on isolated efforts. It must be shared, coherent and sustained. The proposals for catechetical frameworks and teams reflect the conviction that the whole community grows when faith is nourished intentionally and consistently.

Co-Responsibility in a Synodal Church

Co-responsibility is not a mere redistribution of authority but an expression of communion (See above). In a synodal Church, clergy and laity discern and act together, each according to their unique gifts and vocation. Ordained ministry remains essential and irreplaceable, but it is exercised within the People of God and in service to them. This model of Church does not weaken priestly ministry. Rather, it strengthens it and situates it more clearly as a ministry of unity, guidance and sacramental leadership within a community that shares collective responsibility for mission.

Why This Matters for the Congress

If Baptism is only seen as something that happened long ago, our efforts at renewal will remain shallow. Experience shows that when people truly grasp what their Baptism means, something changes within them, faith becomes personal and a quiet fire is lit within. Without that inner shift and change of heart, even the best plans can end up as busy activity rather than genuine renewal. The Congress is therefore not about adding new programmes or increasing burden, but about reflecting on what we do, how we do it and about helping us to rediscover the grace we have already received.

On the road to Emmaus, Cleopas and his companion recognised the risen Lord and their hearts burned within them. They could not keep it to themselves but returned at once to the community to share what they had experienced. When we rediscover our Baptism the same thing happens; missionary disciples are formed and parish communities grow in new energy and hope. Every proposal in this document should be read in the light of this understanding of Baptism.



The Pastoral Area as the Key Structure for the Future

The feedback gathered for this consultative process highlighted that the Pastoral Areas were emerging as a vital structure for the future of mission and outreach in the Archdiocese of Armagh. There is a growing awareness that many parishes on their own do not have the resources to carry out specific pastoral initiatives particularly regarding Youth and Family Ministry. A pastoral area is a cluster of neighbouring parishes that work together in a spirit of collaboration, sharing the gifts and talents present within each community. Guided by the Holy Spirit, this cooperation enables the Church to proclaim the Word of God more effectively and to continue the mission of Christ in the local area.

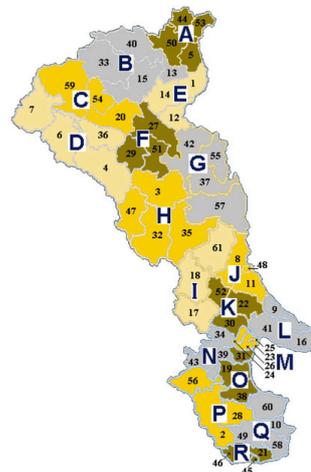
Each pastoral area is led by a priest appointed as Vicar Forane (VF), who provides leadership in accordance with Church law. As the number of priests continues to decline, the importance of the pastoral area will grow. It is envisaged that the current number of pastoral areas may decrease over time from seventeen to nine or ten, allowing for stronger, more resourceful units that will be capable of sustaining vibrant pastoral life.

Strong pastoral Areas offer new opportunities, particularly in areas where shared resources and coordinated planning can have a greater impact. Regular meetings between priests and lay representatives from parish pastoral councils will be essential to discern priorities, develop initiatives and respond effectively to emerging needs.

Two key tasks define the work of the pastoral area:

1. to ensure the effective sharing of gifts and talents across parishes
2. to identify pastoral initiatives that can be carried out more fruitfully together than alone.

Central to this vision is the principle of co-responsibility. Each parish must have an active and strong Pastoral Council. They are now considered by the Church to be as essential as Finance Committees. These councils form the foundation for collaboration, ensuring that the voices and gifts of the faithful are recognised and engaged.



Delegate Process Guide

This section explains how the Diocesan Congress will unfold and how you, as a delegate, will participate in discussion, discernment and decision-making throughout the gathering.

In preparation for the Congress, you have received, in this document, the priorities and proposals in advance. These priorities have already been the subject of considerable reflection across the archdiocese during the past year and especially in the preparatory meetings and spiritual conversations that took place in November and February. During these gatherings, participants reached a broad consensus on the importance of these priorities. As a delegate you are therefore encouraged to read and reflect on the priorities beforehand so that the time at the Congress itself can be devoted primarily to deeper, shared, discussions and decision-making.

On Friday night you will listen to inputs by Archbishop Eamon Martin and two young adults from the diocese, Jake Magill and Shannon Goodwin. Their insights will help deepen and develop your own reflections on the theme 'Youth, Family and Faith'.

On the Saturday morning, you will have a further opportunity to reflect on the priorities. A panel will offer reflections on the priorities from 11:20am to 11:50am. This will be followed by a forty-minute Q&A session. You will be able to submit questions to the panel, electronically and the facilitators will put these questions to the panel during the session. This part of the programme is designed to help you deepen your understanding of the priorities and the issues they raise before moving into the formal decision-making process.

Following this, you, and all the delegates, will move into table discussions. Participants will be seated at tables of six, with approximately forty to forty-five tables in the room. The purpose of these table conversations is to provide a space where delegates can share perspectives, clarify their understanding of the proposals and reflect together on what is being proposed. The tables are not expected to reach agreement or consensus, but will provide an opportunity for discussion and for you to explore the proposals more fully before submitting your individual recommendation.

Each priority contains three proposals, with the exception of the priority titled 'Faith Formation and Catechesis', which contains four proposals. Delegates will spend approximately twenty-five to thirty minutes discussing each priority. This will allow about eight to ten minutes for discussion of each individual proposal at the round table.

After the period of table discussion, each delegate will vote individually on each proposal. Delegates will be asked to choose one of three options:

1. To recommend the proposal to the Archbishop for implementation
2. To recommend the proposal to the Archbishop with changes
3. To indicate that you cannot recommend the proposal to the Archbishop at this time.

Every delegate's recommendation carries equal weight, and decisions are made by delegates individually rather than by the tables.

A proposal will be considered approved if two-thirds of the delegates recommend it as it is, or with changes. If fewer than two-thirds of delegates support a proposal, it will not be recommended at this time.

On Sunday, the Congress will reflect on the outcomes of Saturday's recommendation process. The facilitators will outline three categories of results. First, they will identify which proposals were not recommended and. Second, they will present the proposals that were recommended with changes, outlining the suggested amendments and inviting discussion on what will be required to implement these enhanced proposals. Third, they will review the proposals that were recommended without changes and consider what steps will be needed to put them into practice.

You, along with all the delegates will again return to table discussions on Sunday to explore pathways to action. During these conversations, delegates will consider how the recommended proposals might be implemented, what resources or supports may be needed, and what the next steps might be for the archdiocese. Tables will have opportunities to share their feedback on the implementation of the recommended proposals with all the delegates present. The facilitators and the Diocesan Pastoral Team will gather all the written material, and take note of the spoken inputs, to inform the implementation process.

Following the Congress some issues may require further consultation with delegates via email later in the spring. This, along with the feedback gathered during the Congress, will help shape a pastoral implementation plan for the archdiocese. It is anticipated that this final plan will be published in the Autumn.

In summary, the Congress unfolds in three stages:

1. Personal preparation and reflection on the priorities beforehand
2. Discussion regarding the proposals and recommendations to the Archbishop on Saturday
3. Reflection on the outcomes together with planning for implementation on Sunday.

Through your participation, reflection and recommendations, you will play an important role in shaping the future priorities and pastoral direction of the Archdiocese of Armagh.

Schedule for the Congress

Friday Night	20th March 2026
6.15pm	Tea and Coffee
7.00pm – 9.30pm	Opening Liturgy of the Word including an address by Archbishop Eamon, Jake Magill and Shannon Goodwin. Integrated into the liturgy are music, dancing, singing to showcase young people's talents.
Saturday	21st March 2026
8.30am	Registration with Tea/Coffee.
9.30am	Morning Prayer led by Brother Jean Marie, Taizé, St. Catherines Choir, young people and delegates from across the archdiocese.
10.00am	Framing the Gathering (Dr Oonagh O'Brien and Fr Eamonn Fitzgibbon)
10.10am	Input on Diversity and Inclusion – Caroline Curry and Fr Tony O'Riordan
10.50am	Break - Tea and Coffee
11.20am	Panel Response to Priorities – Bro. Jean Marie, Lizzie Rea, Colm Sherry, Janet Forbes, Archbishop Eamon Martin.
11.50pm	Digital Q & A with Panel (Facilitated by Dr Oonagh and Fr Eamonn)
12.30pm	Discussion of Priorities and Recommendations – The table groups will take each priority in turn to read the proposals, to discuss each proposal and for individual delegates to make their recommendations (25/30 minutes per Priority)
1.00pm	Lunch
2.30pm	Discussion of Priorities and Recommendations – The table groups will take each priority in turn to read the proposals, to discuss each proposal and for individual delegates to make their recommendations (25/30 minutes per Priority)
5.00pm	Tea and Coffee
5.20pm	Leave for Cathedral
6.30pm	Mass in St. Patrick's Cathedral

Schedule for the Congress

Sunday	22nd March 2026
10.15am	Tea and Coffee
11.00am	Morning Prayer led by Brother Jean Marie, Taizé, St Catherines Choir, young people and delegates from across the archdiocese.
11.30am	Presentation of what has Emerged and Outline of Process for the Day
12.00pm	Discussion at Tables and Pathways to Action
1.15pm	Lunch
2.30pm	Discussion at Tables and Pathways to Action
3.15pm	What happens next? (Pastoral Team)
3.30pm	Archbishop's Closing Remarks
3.45pm	Leave Hotel for Concluding Liturgy in St. Malachy's Church
4.00pm	Concluding Liturgy in St. Malachy's Church



Priorities and Proposals: Belonging

Across all three proposals the critical development is to move from hospitality to belonging and mission and to ground everything in Baptism, discipleship and shared responsibility. Without this, all our good initiatives risk remaining short-term, dependent on a few people and ultimately unsustainable. With it, belonging becomes more than just feeling welcome but living as part of a missionary Church.

Proposal 1

Establish a Parish/Pastoral Area Welcome and Hospitality Team to ensure that every person feels recognised, invited and connected to parish life.

Why this is important:

This proposal recognises that many people have become disconnected from the parish. Teams that are intentionally welcoming people counter this by making people visible and valued. However, true belonging must go beyond simple friendliness. It should become a pathway into shared mission, where people are not just welcomed but invited to participate as active members of the Body of Christ, the parish community.

Suggestions relating to this proposal that emerged in the consultation:

- Encourage personal invitation to Mass, ministries, events (not just announcements)
- Ensure a team greet people before Mass
- Introduce regular hospitality moments (e.g. Weekly or monthly refreshments after Mass)
- Provide welcome packs to newcomers and encourage people to register with the parish
- Use parish bulletins and social media to celebrate milestones (baptisms, weddings, anniversaries)
- Assign responsibility beyond just the clergy to lay leadership structures
- Seminar for clergy and parish pastoral councils on the theme of belonging to inform and aid follow-up at parish level
- Prepare and produce dedicated pamphlets for a "Reaching Out" series for particular groups migrants; travellers; LGBTQ; others who may feel excluded
- Train teams in intentional accompaniment, not just meeting and greeting (similar to a sponsor in the OCIA)

7 Year Goal

The parish becomes a welcoming community where long-term residents and newcomers are noticed and included

Initial Response of the Diocesan Clergy to this Proposal:

Clergy responses to the proposal were generally supportive in principle. Personal contact was widely seen as the most effective form of outreach, including home visits, blessings of houses, invitations through schools and engagement at parish celebrations such as baptisms and weddings. Practical suggestions included outreach or invitation cards, welcome packs, improved parish registration and the use of bulletins and social media. However, clergy also highlighted significant challenges, including limited volunteers and rural/urban differences. Training and diocesan guidance were seen as necessary to support small welcome teams focused on intentional relationship-building rather than programmes. Some also noted that many Catholics remain disengaged despite invitations.

Priorities and Proposals: Belonging

Proposal 2

Help all parishioners, especially the vulnerable to feel cared for, heard and valued.

Why this is important:

This proposal reflects the Church's core mission of compassion and justice. It ensures that those most at risk of isolation are not forgotten. Yet it must move beyond charitable activity to recognising the vulnerable as full participants in the Church's life and mission, not simply recipients of care but members with dignity and a voice.

Suggestions relating to this proposal that emerged in the consultation:

- Develop trained visitation teams (with proper safeguarding, records and consent)
- Prioritise outreach to the sick, elderly, isolated, bereaved etc
- Establish regular dialogue and listening opportunities within parishes
- Expand outreach beyond church buildings into homes, schools, community settings
- Create feedback loops so the vulnerable shape parish priorities
- Establish pastoral area coordination to ensure consistency and sustainability

7 Year Goal

That there would be a reliable, compassionate network in each parish where people feel listened to, and no one feels forgotten or disconnected

Initial Response of the Diocesan Clergy to this Proposal:

Clergy strongly affirmed the importance of ensuring that vulnerable parishioners are supported and included in parish life. However, they highlighted significant practical challenges, particularly the shortage of priests and volunteers to sustain outreach initiatives. Many emphasised the importance of teamwork, with greater lay involvement required to develop visitation ministries and pastoral care networks. Suggestions included establishing trained bereavement support groups, organising social gatherings that encourage conversation and connection and appointing designated link persons in each parish to coordinate these outreach efforts. Some clergy also noted that the current structure of pastoral areas may need review to ensure genuine collaboration and consistency of mission. Overall, clergy supported the proposal but stressed that it will require coordinated teamwork, additional volunteers and realistic pastoral planning.

Priorities and Proposals: Belonging

Proposal 3

Encourage Youth and Family Belonging Through the Use of Parish Facilities and Increased Parish Participation

Why is this important:

Many young people and families are often absent not through disinterest but through a slow disconnection over time. This proposal tries to address that gap by creating spaces of engagement. However, belonging must not be reduced to just activities or social gatherings. It should lead young people and families into real participation in the Church's mission and identity as co-responsible disciples.

Suggestions relating to this proposal that emerged in the consultation:

- Make parishes places where young people and families actively belong and participate by developing youth clubs and safe spaces at parish or pastoral area level
- Create family-friendly gathering spaces in parish facilities
- Build links with schools, sports clubs (especially the GAA), community groups and work to avoid scheduling conflicts with these groups
- Engage JPII award participants and young leaders in parish initiatives
- Develop intergenerational models of ministry not just separate youth ministry
- Ensure there is coordination across the pastoral area

7 Year Goal

Create a visible and active presence of young people and families, with the parish becoming a place for social connection

Initial Response of the Diocesan Clergy to this Proposal:

Clergy welcomed the intention to strengthen youth and family belonging but noted practical obstacles in implementing such initiatives. Many highlighted the need for volunteers and trained leaders to support youth activities and programmes. Concerns were also raised about parish facilities, with some churches lacking suitable or safe spaces for youth gatherings and community events. Suggestions included encouraging children and families to participate more actively in parish ministries such as altar serving, reading and music, as well as organising events like sports liturgies or parish gatherings that connect with local schools and community groups. Clergy also emphasised the importance of creating safe spaces where young people can engage informally with priests outside sacramental settings. While supportive of the vision, some felt that implementation may be challenging in certain areas without additional resources and leadership.

Priorities and Proposals: Ecosystem of Parish, School and Family

Across all four proposals in this section the essential call is for a move from school led and based faith formation to a more balanced and shared delivery across parishes and families. There is an expressed need to move away from the one-off big events to more ongoing, sustainable models of formation. For this to happen there has to be clearer structures for collaboration across parish, school and family along with a renewed vision for the domestic church.

Proposal 1

Parish/School/Family Partnership Framework

Why this is important:

This proposal is crucial because it recognises that faith formation cannot be sustained by schools alone. A structured partnership restores shared responsibility between parish, school and family. Its importance lies in moving from informal cooperation to an intentional ecosystem where faith is consistently reinforced across all settings, not left to chance or individual effort.

Suggestions relating to this proposal that emerged in the consultation:

- Establish a local partnership group (parish, school leaders, parent representatives) creating clear communication channels (shared updates, key contacts, simple calendars)
- Organising annual parish, school and family faith gatherings
- Providing structured reflection guides for use in school and home
- Define shared responsibility for faith formation so that the school is not the only source of delivery
- Encourage priests and parishes to have a presence in schools in a sustainable and planned way
- Invite teachers to be members of parish pastoral councils

7 Year Goal

Create a visible, working partnership in parishes where faith is reinforced across school, parish and home

Initial Response of the Diocesan Clergy to this Proposal:

Clergy generally affirmed the importance of stronger collaboration between parish, school and family, recognizing that schools currently carry much of the responsibility for faith formation. Many noted that schools already maintain strong relationships with parishes and that children often respond positively to faith initiatives. However, clergy expressed concern that parental disengagement from the Church remains a major challenge. Suggestions included appointing parish or pastoral area catechists, involving teachers in parish pastoral councils, organising annual faith gatherings, and strengthening sacramental preparation programmes such as Do This in Memory. Clergy also emphasised the need for clearer structures, training, and greater lay leadership, as priests alone cannot coordinate such partnerships. Some noted practical challenges, including teachers' limited availability, many teachers not living in the parish and the need for clearer diocesan guidance regarding the parish/school relationship.

Priorities and Proposals: Ecosystem of Parish, School and Family

Proposal 2

Family Faith Support and Domestic Church Initiative

Why this is important:

This proposal is necessary because it re-centres the family as the primary place of faith formation. Without this shift, parish and school efforts remain limited. Its importance lies in reactivating the domestic church, where faith is lived daily, enabling children and parents alike to grow as disciples rooted in prayer, relationship and shared belief.

Suggestions relating to this proposal that emerged in the consultation:

- Provide simple, accessible resources to support prayer and faith at home
- Link all initiatives to sacramental preparation programmes
- Offer family faith evenings and workshops at parish or pastoral area level, developing parish-based supports for families under pressure
- Promote the idea of the 'domestic church' in a clear and practical way
- Form parents as faith leaders and integrate this into the sacramental preparation of children

7 Year Goal

Families become more confident about sharing and living the faith at home

Initial Response of the Diocesan Clergy to this Proposal:

Clergy broadly supported the focus on strengthening the family as the primary place of faith formation but highlighted significant challenges. Many noted that parents often lack confidence in their own faith, making it difficult for them to act as faith leaders in the home. As a result, clergy emphasised the need for strong adult faith formation, catechesis for parents, and simple practical supports such as prayer cards, family prayer gatherings, and resources linked to sacramental preparation programmes like Do This in Memory. Encouraging small habits of faith in the home, such as prayer at meals, the Rosary, and blessings of homes, was also suggested. However, clergy repeatedly stressed the lack of personnel and resources to implement such initiatives without wider support. Training, diocesan coordination and consistent resources across parishes were seen as essential for any meaningful development of the domestic church.

Priorities and Proposals: Ecosystem of Parish, School and Family

Proposal 3

Community Hubs and Shared Faith Experiences for Young People and Families

Why this is important:

This proposal responds to the fragmentation of community life by creating spaces for connection. It is important because it brings together faith, social support and daily life. It makes the parish present in people's real lives, especially for young people and families who no longer attend Church or rarely encounter Church personnel.

Suggestions relating to this proposal that emerged in the consultation:

- Develop parish centres as hubs for youth and family activity
- Organise joint parish – school service projects (charity, outreach, community support)
- Provide youth activities promoted through schools (retreats, trips, etc.)
- Offering community support days (financial advice, wellbeing, social supports)
- Include spiritual resources (libraries, online supports) in parish settings

7 Year Goal

Parishes working in partnership with schools become centres of support, faith and community life for families and young people

Initial Response of the Diocesan Clergy to this Proposal:

Clergy recognised the value of creating community spaces and shared experiences that engage young people and families beyond sacramental moments. Suggestions included family-friendly Masses, youth leadership opportunities, parish events, retreats and stronger connections with schools, clubs and local organisations. Some noted that aspects of this approach already exist in many communities through schools, youth clubs and organisations such as the GAA. However, clergy raised practical concerns about implementation, including lack of facilities, funding, and suitable leaders to coordinate initiatives. Even where youth centers exist, attracting young people can remain difficult. Several clergy called for clearer focus on the Church's mission and for trained coordinators or retreat teams to ensure consistent messaging. Overall, while supportive of the concept, many felt that new initiatives must be realistic and properly resourced.

Priorities and Proposals: Prayer and Spirituality

The three proposals in relation to this priority express a need to move from seeing prayer as an optional devotion that is often private and inward looking to a more public and foundational priority in the lives of Catholics. There is a need to create sustained rhythms of prayer throughout the year. Prayer should be seen as the source of renewal, the engine room of mission and the foundation of all pastoral activity. Without this understanding of prayer all our other initiatives risk becoming unfocused and ultimately unsustainable.

Proposal 1

Develop Parish/Pastoral Area and Diocesan Prayer Guide Ministry for Individual and Group Accompaniment

Why this is important:

This proposal is crucial because it moves prayer from a duty, or pleasant experience, to something more – to personal transformation. Spiritual direction and accompaniment help individuals grow in relationship with God and discern their vocation. It helps form mature missionary disciples who are sustained by prayer and capable of participating fully in the Church's mission.

Suggestions relating to this proposal that emerged in the consultation:

- Call forward and train parish prayer guides
- Provide formation in individual spiritual accompaniment
- Offer 1-to-1 and small group prayer support
- Provide accompaniment for sacramental journeys
- Provide diocesan support and supervision
- Diocese to provide seasonal prayer and spirituality resources to parishes and pastoral areas.

7 Year Goal

Regular accompanied prayer becomes a normal part of Christian life for parishioners.

Initial Response of the Diocesan Clergy to this Proposal:

Clergy responses were generally supportive but cautious about some aspects. Many noted that much is already happening through Adoration, Lectio Divina, pilgrim groups and parish prayer initiatives, and stressed that the Mass and prayerful celebration of the liturgy must remain central. They saw value in spiritual accompaniment, seasonal resources and training lay people to support parish prayer but questioned whether one-to-one accompaniment is realistic given the privacy of prayer and the time required for proper formation. Several highlighted the importance of good preaching, Scripture-based reflection, public celebration of the Divine Office and clearer teaching on the difference between simply saying prayers and entering into a prayerful attitude. Overall, clergy welcomed the vision but stressed that it needs proper training, diocesan support, funding and realistic expectations.

Priorities and Proposals: Prayer and Spirituality

Proposal 2

Establish Diocesan Retreat and Prayer Pathways for Youth, Families and Adults

Why this is important:

This proposal creates space for deeper encounter with God beyond routine practice or duty. Retreats and varied prayer experiences help people rediscover silence and reflection. They also foster conversion and renewal, enabling people to grow as missionary disciples and not just participants in events or occasional spiritual experiences. For many, especially young people, retreats become important moments of encounter with Christ, offering space for silence, discernment and personal reflection that is not always possible in school or parish settings. These experiences can play a significant role in deepening personal faith and integrating it more consciously into everyday life.

Suggestions relating to this proposal that emerged in the consultation:

- Develop diocesan youth retreat teams
- Provide parish/pastoral area quiet days
- Introduce Taizé-style, contemplative prayer and other appropriate forms of prayer
- Promote Eucharistic Adoration, Lectio Divina and other forms of Scripture meditation, and other spiritual practices from the Catholic Tradition
- Organise local, affordable, pilgrimages with parish fundraising where needed

7 Year Goal

Accessible opportunities for retreat and prayer exist in every pastoral area.

Initial Response of the Diocesan Clergy to this Proposals:

Clergy were broadly positive about this proposal and recognised retreats, pilgrimages and prayer initiatives as valuable opportunities for encounter with Christ and spiritual renewal. Eucharistic Adoration, Advent and Lenten retreats, local pilgrimages and affordable prayer experiences were all seen as fruitful and already popular in many places. There was strong support for youth retreat teams, family-based initiatives, Lectio Divina and greater lay participation. At the same time, clergy repeatedly raised practical questions about leadership, volunteers, funding and responsibility for delivery. Many felt retreats should be local, accessible and clearly focused on prayer rather than activity for its own sake. They also emphasised the need for follow-up, accompaniment and ongoing ministry so that retreat experiences lead people more deeply into parish life.

Priorities and Proposals: Prayer and Spirituality

Proposal 3

Renewal of Prayer in the Home (The Domestic Church)

Why this is important:

This proposal is vital because it situates faith in daily life, not just in church attendance. Without prayer in the home renewal cannot take hold. Its deeper importance lies in restoring prayer as the foundation of Christian identity and discipleship, where individuals and families encounter Christ personally and are sustained for participation in the Church's life and mission. Many parents express a desire to support their children's faith but feel unsure about how to pray together or how to speak about faith in everyday situations. As a result, prayer often becomes associated primarily with school or parish settings rather than with family life. Supporting prayer in the home helps reconnect school and parish formation with everyday lived experience. It also supports parents in their role as the first educators in faith, ensuring that sacramental preparation is not experienced as a one-time event but as part of an ongoing journey of Christian life within the family.

Suggestions relating to this proposal that emerged in the consultation:

- Link prayer explicitly to Baptismal identity and discipleship (e.g. Baptised and Sent resource)
- Provide family prayer resources through schools/parishes
- Link prayer with sacramental preparation
- Encourage small home-based prayer groups
- Promote seasonal prayer rhythms
- Support teacher faith formation
- Offer guided reflection evenings that are simple and assessable
- Create simple, repeatable prayer initiatives rather than one-off initiatives
- Provide formation in how to pray not just providing resources
- Establish pastoral area structures to support and sustain this work

7 Year Goal

Prayer becomes part of the normal rhythm of daily family life.

Initial Response of the Diocesan Clergy to this Proposals:

Clergy strongly supported the renewal of prayer in the home, seeing it as essential for sustaining faith beyond church and school settings. They favoured simple, practical measures such as prayer cards, candles, seasonal resources, baptism-linked materials, and brief workshops to help families pray together. Some suggested annual gatherings for families of baptised children, neighbourhood prayer, and public recitation of the Divine Office as ways of modelling shared prayer. At the same time, clergy highlighted the shortage of people to lead such work and called for catechists, diocesan support and better formation around Baptism and family faith. While home-based prayer groups were welcomed, some warned against them becoming exclusive or disconnected from parish life. Overall, clergy supported a gradual, practical approach rooted in families already engaged.

Priorities and Proposals: Faith Formation and Catechesis

Across all three proposals that emerged from the consultation there is a move towards faith formation as formation for mission and lifelong discipleship rather than provision of academic style courses. Faith formation must be ongoing and mission oriented or it will not future proof the Church in our diocese from decline.

Proposal 1

Establish a Diocesan Catechetical Framework and Parish/Pastoral Area Based Catechetical Teams.

Why this is important:

This proposal is essential because it introduces coherence and sustainability to faith formation across the diocese. It moves beyond fragmented parish-by-parish efforts. Such an approach would help ensure that faith formation is not dependent solely on local capacity but is supported by a coherent and sustainable framework across the diocese. Its deeper importance lies in creating a structured pathway of discipleship, where catechesis is not occasional instruction but an integrated, lifelong process forming people in faith, identity and mission.

Suggestions relating to this proposal that emerged in the consultation:

- Call forward and commissioning a diocesan catechetical team
- Develop a diocesan catechetical framework with pathways of faith development for each age group
- Have a preferential focus on young adult catechesis
- Establish parish/pastoral area catechetical teams including parents, teachers, trained volunteers
- Introduce and support the formal Ministry of Catechist
- Provide diocesan training, safeguarding and formation programmes
- Pilot programmes in selected areas before gradual wider rollout.

7 Year Goal

A coherent, well-supported catechetical system operating across all parishes and pastoral areas

Initial Response of the Diocesan Clergy to this Proposal:

Clergy broadly supported the creation of a coherent diocesan catechetical framework, recognising the urgent need for structured and lifelong faith formation. Many emphasised the importance of introducing and prioritising the formal Ministry of Catechist and developing trained diocesan and parish catechetical teams to support clergy. However, practical concerns were frequently raised, including funding, training, and the limited capacity of priests already managing multiple pastoral demands. Clergy stressed the importance of clear roles, realistic expectations and pilot programmes in both rural and urban contexts. Several recommended drawing on existing movements and resources already active in the diocese. They also highlighted the need for catechesis rooted in sound doctrine, Scripture, and the sacraments, while ensuring consistency across parishes. Overall, clergy viewed the proposal as essential but stressed the need for proper resourcing, clarity of purpose and practical implementation.

Priorities and Proposals: Faith Formation and Catechesis

Proposal 2

Family-Centred Sacramental Formation

Why this is important:

This proposal addresses one of the most critical gaps in Irish Church life the disconnect between sacramental preparation and ongoing faith life. It is important because it reorients formation around the family. Its deeper significance lies in transforming sacraments from isolated events into steps along a continuous journey of discipleship. Formation should support ongoing family faith development across a person's lifetime, recognising that Baptism marks the beginning of a lifelong process of discipleship.

Suggestions relating to this proposal that emerged in the consultation:

- Develop family-focused catechesis programmes linked to sacramental moments
- Make post-sacramental pathways normative and expected, not optional
- Create simple, accessible faith formation resources for families
- Ensure programmes do not assume prior faith knowledge and are welcoming to all
- Offer intergenerational catechesis events
- Embed within a diocesan-wide structure that is not dependent on local initiatives only

7 Year Goal

That faith formation becomes a continuous journey rooted in family life and is not a one-time event

Initial Response of the Diocesan Clergy to this Proposal:

Clergy generally welcomed the emphasis on reconnecting sacramental preparation with family faith life. Many agreed that formation should begin with Baptism and continue throughout life, rather than treating sacraments as isolated events. Suggestions included simple family-based programmes, parent gatherings during sacramental preparation, and strengthening links between parents, grandparents and children in faith formation. Some pointed to existing initiatives, such as Do This in Memory, as useful models that could be developed further. Clergy also highlighted the value of lay faith groups, peer ministry and accessible digital resources to support families. However, concerns were expressed about the need for clearer planning, strong diocesan coordination and trained personnel to implement such initiatives effectively. Overall, clergy supported the vision but emphasised the importance of simplicity, realistic planning and sustained support.

Priorities and Proposals: Faith Formation and Catechesis

Proposal 3

Youth and Adult Faith Formation Courses

Why this is important:

This proposal recognises that faith formation cannot end in childhood. It is vital for addressing adult and youth disengagement. It encourages us to foster a culture where faith continues to grow throughout life, forming mature disciples capable of understanding, articulating and living their faith in today's world.

Suggestions relating to this proposal that emerged in the consultation:

- Provide accessible, relevant, engaging faith formation for young people and adults by introducing post-Confirmation youth programmes, using existing high-quality resources (e.g. Alpha, Sycamore, Formed) that can be adapted for local needs
- Develop scripture study groups and faith discussion spaces for adults, addressing key contemporary questions
- Use digital tools and creative approaches (videos, arts, storytelling)
- Provide youth leadership and apologetics training
- Address contemporary questions especially in relation to science and church teaching

7 Year Goal

Create a culture of ongoing formation where both young people and adults continue to grow in faith

Initial Response of the Diocesan Clergy to this Proposal:

Clergy recognised the importance of providing ongoing faith formation beyond childhood and expressed support for accessible programmes for both young people and adults. Many suggested using established resources such as Alpha or Sycamore, supported by trained facilitators and delivered through short local courses. Scripture study groups, faith discussion spaces and digital platforms were also seen as valuable tools for engagement, particularly with young people who are active online. Clergy emphasised the need for well-formed catechists and leaders to guide such initiatives, as well as the importance of addressing contemporary questions about faith in a positive and pastoral manner. Encouraging young people to take active leadership roles and meeting them in settings beyond the church building were also highlighted as important. Overall, clergy supported the proposal as a key step toward fostering lifelong faith development.

Priorities and Proposals: Faith Formation and Catechesis

Proposal 4

Pilot Parish/Pastoral Area Based Post-Confirmation Programmes

Why this is important:

Post-primary disengagement is widely recognised across the submissions received. Many young people who have completed their primary school sacramental journey gradually lose connection with parish life during their teenage years because of the few opportunities provided for continued accompaniment or participation.

Suggestions relating to this proposal that emerged in the consultation:

- A diocesan pilot programme led jointly by teachers, parents, young adults and clergy would help support young people beyond Confirmation by providing structured opportunities for faith development, reflection and belonging. Such a programme could create space for peer leadership, mentoring and shared experience, enabling young people to remain connected to their faith community during this formative stage of life.
- Link post Confirmation programme with Pope JP II Award participation
- Develop young adult peer ministry
- Use schools as communication partners
- Provide diocesan support

7 Year Goal

A sustainable post-confirmation faith formation structure exists across the diocese.

Initial Response of the Diocesan Clergy to this Proposal:

Clergy widely recognised the challenge of young people disengaging from parish life after Confirmation and supported the development of structured post-Confirmation programmes. Suggestions included small group gatherings, service opportunities, peer leadership and links with initiatives such as the Pope John Paul II Award. Some proposed raising the age of Confirmation to strengthen commitment and maturity. Clergy also highlighted the importance of personal invitation, ongoing accompaniment and creating regular opportunities for young people to stay connected to parish life. However, concerns were raised about the availability of suitable spaces, trained leaders and committed volunteers to sustain such programmes. Several stressed the importance of forming teachers, parents and young adults who can assist clergy in leading these initiatives. Overall, clergy supported pilot programmes but emphasised the need for strong leadership and realistic resources.

Priorities and Proposals: Liturgy and Participation

Across all three proposals is a necessary and essential move from participation understood as “helping the priest” to participation grounded in baptismal dignity and shared responsibility for the Church’s mission. Liturgy must be reclaimed not simply as something we attend or organise, but as the primary place where missionary disciples are formed and sent. Without this shift, improvements in music, ministries or youth involvement will remain functional rather than transformative.

Proposal 1

Establish Parish or Pastoral Area Liturgy Leadership Teams Supported by a Re-Established Diocesan Liturgy Commission

Why this is important: This proposal encompasses the widespread call for more engaging liturgies and for greater involvement by young people and families. However, many proposals remained dependent on clergy initiatives or informal volunteer support. Establishing parish/pastoral area liturgy teams, supported by a diocesan commission, would enable liturgy to become a shared responsibility rooted in baptism rather than a task carried primarily by clergy.

Suggestions relating to this proposal that emerged in the consultation:

- Establish parish/pastoral area liturgy teams with defined roles
- Ground the liturgy group in a theology of liturgy as formation for mission
- Share planning and resources across pastoral areas rather than in individual parishes
- Support formation through diocesan liturgy commission
- Begin preparations for the introduction of the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte
- Provide seasonal planning resources using national and diocesan resources (advent, lent, etc.)
- Ensuring proper safeguarding and approval processes for all ministries
- Establishing youth liturgy sub-groups at parish or pastoral area level
- Develop children’s liturgy resources and family-friendly liturgies
- Encourage youth led elements such as music, prayers, symbols, reflections
- Strengthen music ministries, including youth involvement in choirs
- Move from viewing responsibility for liturgy as a role/job to a co-responsibility that is rooted in baptism.

7 Year Goal

Liturgy, in all its forms, becomes consistently well-prepared, participatory and formative across the diocese through shared lay and ordained leadership.

Initial Response of the Diocesan Clergy to this Proposal:

Clergy responses generally supported the development of parish liturgy teams and the re-establishment of a diocesan liturgy commission, recognising the importance of shared responsibility for liturgical life. Many emphasised the need for strong formation so that participation is rooted in understanding the meaning of the sacraments and the theology of worship rather than simply performing roles. Suggestions included greater involvement of lay people, including women and young people, improved music ministries, and better preparation for liturgical seasons. However, clergy cautioned against creating unnecessary new structures where parish groups already exist and stressed the need for fidelity to the Church’s liturgical norms and a renewed focus on the Mass as the central act of worship and sacrifice. Training, clear diocesan guidance and attention to reverence, beauty and the sense of mystery in the liturgy were highlighted as essential.

Priorities and Proposals: Liturgy and Participation

Proposal 2

Provide Ongoing Formation for Clergy and Lay Liturgical Ministers

Why this is important:

The proposals that emerged repeatedly identify the need to enhance homilies, music ministries and people's understanding of the Mass. Yet without structured formation, participation risks becoming simply about helping things to run smoothly. Providing opportunities for clergy and lay ministers to grow in their understanding of the meaning of the sacraments and the liturgy would help ensure that participation is rooted in faith rather than routine. Formation also helps to deepen our understanding of how Christ is present in these moments, and how this connects to everyday Christian life and mission.

Suggestions relating to this proposal that emerged in the consultation:

- Provide preaching formation and shared homily resources for clergy
- Offer theological and spiritual formation for readers, musicians, eucharistic ministers and altar servers not just skills training
- Offer guided reflection sessions after the celebration of sacraments to help individuals and families understand more deeply the meaning of what they have received and how it relates to daily life. This could apply particularly to confirmation and matrimony
- Develop simple printed or digital mass participation guides
- Host seasonal liturgy formation evenings (e.g. Advent, lent)

7 Year Goal

A well-formed body of lay ministers co-leading meaningful liturgy with clergy.

Initial Response of the Diocesan Clergy to this Proposal:

Clergy widely recognised the importance of ongoing formation for both clergy and lay ministers in order to deepen understanding and participation in the liturgy. Many supported opportunities for theological and spiritual formation for readers, Eucharistic ministers, musicians and altar servers, as well as improved resources for preaching. Practical suggestions included retreats or pilgrimages for liturgical ministers, training in proclamation of the Word, seasonal formation sessions, and opportunities for collaboration among parish groups. Clergy also emphasised the need for clearer diocesan guidelines, particularly for wedding and funeral liturgies. Some raised concerns about the availability of volunteers and the risk of over-structuring ministries, while others suggested reducing the number of Masses to allow for better prepared and more meaningful celebrations. Overall, clergy affirmed that formation, teamwork and strong leadership are essential to enhancing the quality of liturgical life.

Priorities and Proposals: Liturgy and Participation

Proposal 3

Create Pathways for Youth, Young Adult and Family Participation in Liturgical Life

Why this is important:

Many young people are currently absent from Sunday worship not through disinterest but gradual disengagement. Youth participation must move beyond occasional involvement to defined pathways of liturgical leadership and responsibility.

Suggestions relating to this proposal that emerged in the consultation:

- Establish Pastoral Area Youth/Young Adult Liturgy Groups
- Introduce regular family/youth-inclusive Masses in parishes/Pastoral Areas
- Involve young people in music, prayer, symbol and reflection
- Develop children's liturgy resources
- Link liturgical participation with wider parish mission

7 Year Goal

Young people, young adults and families have a visible and meaningful presence in the Sunday liturgy.

Initial Response of the Diocesan Clergy to this Proposal:

Clergy acknowledged the importance of engaging young people and families more intentionally in liturgical life but stressed that participation should be meaningful and integrated into the main Sunday liturgy rather than separated into parallel celebrations. Suggestions included strengthening children's liturgy with appropriate formation, supporting altar servers, encouraging youth involvement in music and reading and establishing youth liturgy groups linked with schools and parish initiatives. Some emphasised the importance of beauty, reverence and a strong sense of mystery in the liturgy to help young people appreciate its depth. Others highlighted the potential of social justice initiatives and leadership development to attract younger generations. While supportive of structured pathways for involvement, clergy also questioned whether sufficient interest and leadership exist, stressing the need for strong faith formation and well-prepared liturgies.

Priorities and Proposals: Digital Communication and Evangelisation

Across all three proposals the essential move is from simply broadcasting events to evangelisation, conversion and discipleship and from isolated initiatives to a diocesan wide structure and movement. The digital sphere must no longer be seen as just an optional extra but as a core space of mission, where the Church encounters people, accompanies them, forms them and leads them into real, lived Christian community. Without this shift digital efforts will remain important but not transformative.

Proposal 1

Create Diocesan Digital Mission Teams that are Regionally Based and supported by the diocese

Why this is important:

This proposal recognises that digital communication cannot remain informal or lacking direction. Regional teams provide the structure needed to move beyond efforts that are dependent on a few people. Importantly, it opens the possibility of forming “digital apostles” who engage intentionally in mission, not just communication, helping the Church enter into the digital space as a place of encounter, accompaniment and evangelisation.

Suggestions relating to this proposal that emerged in the consultation:

- Establishing small Digital Mission Teams in, perhaps, 3 or 4 regions in the diocese
- Define these teams explicitly as mission teams, not just communications teams and provide formation in evangelisation, not just technical skills
- Establishing formal diocesan mandates and accountability structures
- Conducting a diocesan-wide audit of existing digital capability and share best practices
- Identifying and recruiting young people and skilled parishioners to take on the task
- Create cross-parish collaboration, avoiding duplication
- Ensure leadership is lay-led and not dependent on priests

7 Year Goal

Every region in the diocese has a trained and supported team with the confidence and training to communicate faith online

Initial Response of the Diocesan Clergy to this Proposal:

Clergy generally recognised the growing importance of digital communication for evangelisation, particularly for reaching younger generations. Many supported the idea of regionally based, lay-led digital mission teams and saw value in producing short faith reflections, podcasts and online resources linked to parish life. However, several expressed uncertainty about their own digital competence and emphasised the need for training, theological formation and diocesan oversight to ensure content remains faithful to Catholic teaching. Concerns were also raised about funding, potential over-centralisation and the risk of digital engagement replacing personal relationships. Clergy stressed that digital mission should always lead people toward real participation in parish life. Overall, the proposal was viewed as ambitious but potentially valuable if properly resourced, coordinated and grounded in authentic evangelisation.

Priorities and Proposals: Digital Communication and Evangelisation

Proposal 2

Develop a Diocesan Digital Formation and Content Creation Hub

Why this is important:

A central hub ensures consistency, quality and accessibility in digital faith formation. It reduces duplication and supports parishes that lack capacity. However, its deeper importance lies in forming disciples, not just distributing content. Digital content must become a means of encounter, drawing people into relationship with Christ and participation in the Church's life and mission.

Suggestions relating to this proposal that emerged in the consultation:

- Provide high-quality, consistent, accessible faith content across the diocese by developing a central diocesan digital platform (website/app)
- Create short faith formation videos, 'thought for the day' reflections, sacramental preparation resources, promote trusted online resources for faith/prayer
- Ensure content is created for all age groups
- Design content that invites response, reflection and engagement
- Link all parish platforms into a shared diocesan communications network
- Include training for local leaders to use and create content with missionary purpose

7 Year Goal

That there would be an effective and vibrant diocesan digital presence supporting connection, evangelisation and formation

Initial Response of the Diocesan Clergy to this Proposal:

Clergy broadly welcomed the concept of a diocesan digital hub that could provide high-quality resources and support parishes lacking technical capacity. Many saw value in a central platform offering ready-made content such as short formation videos, reflections, sacramental preparation resources and templates for parish communications. Some suggested linking diocesan content with trusted national or international resources and ensuring materials are accessible to different groups, including those in nursing homes or with limited mobility. However, clergy also highlighted the need for trained personnel to manage such a hub and questioned whether sufficient resources and expertise currently exist. They emphasised that digital initiatives must complement, not replace, local pastoral engagement and parish community life. Overall, the proposal was viewed positively but as ambitious and dependent on strong diocesan support and coordination.

Priorities and Proposals: Digital Communication and Evangelisation

Proposal 3

Digital Evangelisation Outreach to Young People and those on the Margins.

Why this is important:

This proposal acknowledges that many people now live significant parts of their lives online, especially the young and those distant from Church. It is vital because it repositions evangelisation into the reality of people's lives. However, its true value lies in creating pathways from digital contact to belonging, discipleship and participation in Christian community.

Suggestions relating to this proposal that emerged in the consultation:

- Try and reach people, especially young people, where they are at, while strengthening their in-person involvement with the Church.
- Develop online youth faith groups linked to parish life
- Use social media to share real parish stories and testimonies and prioritise storytelling, testimony and witness
- Promote events, ministries and issue invitations
- Offer training to build digital capacity keeping in mind its moral and spiritual dimensions
- Train young people to become evangelisers and digital faith leaders among their peers

7 Year Goal

Develop a pathway from online engagement to real parish participation and involvement for the younger generations and those on the margins of Church life.

Initial Response of the Diocesan Clergy to this Proposal:

Clergy acknowledged the importance of reaching people, especially young people, through digital platforms but expressed caution about over-reliance on online engagement. Many supported using social media, short teaching videos and authentic parish stories to invite people into deeper faith, particularly if led by young people themselves. At the same time, clergy strongly emphasised that digital outreach must lead to real, face-to-face encounters within parish communities. Concerns were raised about the impact of excessive digital media on loneliness and isolation, with some stressing that faith is ultimately formed through personal relationships and sacramental life. Clergy also noted the need for volunteers, training and clear pastoral direction to implement such initiatives. Overall, the proposal was seen as valuable but highly challenging and requiring careful balance between digital outreach and personal accompaniment.

Implementation Timeline

Sept 2026	Launch of the Pastoral Plan for the Archdiocese of Armagh 2026-2033
October 2026 to September 2027	Parishes, Pastoral Areas and the Diocese identify the resources they need to implement the Pastoral Plan.
October 2027 to June 2029	Period of formation and training for parish, pastoral area and diocesan personnel to provide the the foundational work necessary to set up a network of Youth and Family Ministry across the diocese.
Oct 2030	Regional Review of Progress
Oct 2031	Regional Review of Progress
October 2032 (Patrician Year)	Beginning of Preparation for the next Diocesan Congress and review of progress
October 2033 (Year of Redemption)	Diocesan Congress to review progress and Propose plans for the next seven-year period.

Appendix 1: QR Codes for Preparatory Podcast Series

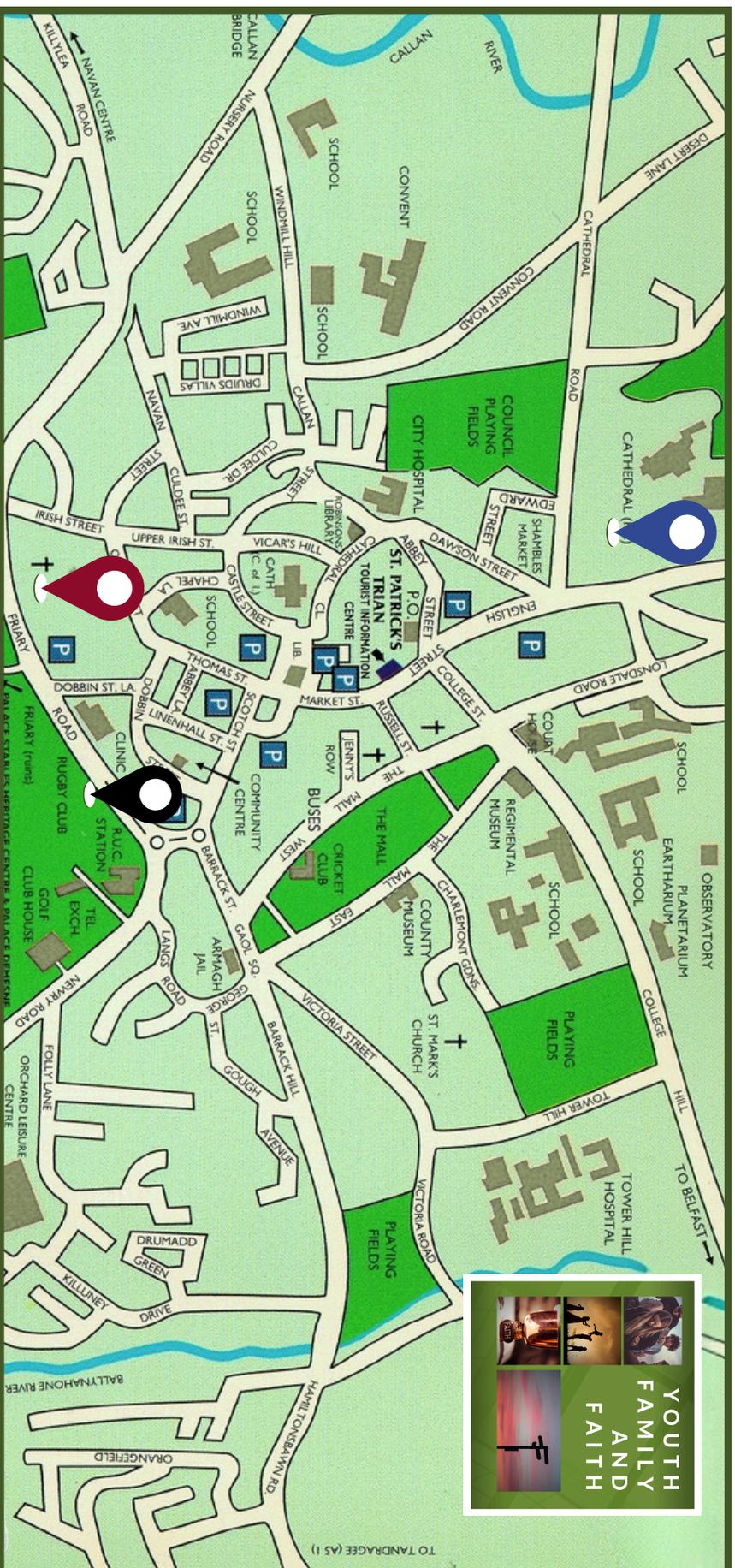


To support delegates in preparing for the Archdiocesan Congress on Youth, Family and Faith, a short series of podcasts has been created to accompany the Preparatory Document. Delegates are encouraged, as far as possible, to read the document in advance, as it outlines the journey of listening and discernment across the Archdiocese and presents the priorities and proposals for discussion at the Congress.

The podcasts act as a companion to the document, introducing the key themes and helping delegates reflect and prepare ahead of the gathering in March. The QR codes below link directly to each episode in the series.



DIOCESAN CONGRESS: DIRECTIONS TO VENUE



The main venue for our Congress on Youth Family and Faith will be the Armagh City Hotel

 **Armagh City Hotel**

With the celebration of the Congress Mass on Saturday 21st March in St. Patrick's Cathedral

 **Saint Patrick's Cathedral Armagh**

and a Closing liturgy in St. Malachy's Church Armagh on Sunday 22nd March

 **Saint Malachy's Church**

NOTES ON VENUE LOCATIONS:

Main Congress Venue

Dates: 20th – 22nd March 2026

Armagh City Hotel

2 Friary Road

Armagh

BT60 4FR

Congress Mass

Date: 21st March 2026

St. Patrick's Cathedral

41 Cathedral Road

Armagh

BT61 7QX

Closing Liturgy

Date: Sunday 22nd March 2026

St. Malachy's

54 Irish Street

Armagh

BT61 7EP

Parking for the Congress Mass and Closing Liturgy

- For the Congress Mass, delegates are asked to access the Cathedral grounds and parking via the Moy Road entrance.
- Please note that a football match will be taking place in the Athletic Grounds on Sunday 22 March. To help ensure a smooth and timely departure after the closing liturgy, delegates are advised to park in St Malachy's Church car park on Friary Road on Sunday morning.

**Please follow the stewards directions
at all times when you get to each
venue.**



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