Statement to Accompany the Proposals from the Working Group on Women

The Working Group on Women offers this submission as the fruit of prayer, listening, discussion and shared work carried out in a short and demanding timeframe.

The working group on women recognises that this is not yet a fully developed set of final proposals. It is seen as a working document that names the main areas of agreement, the key concerns that emerged, and issues where consensus could not be reached and that need further reflection. The group has gathered rich material, but there has not been enough time to develop every proposal fully with a comprehensive description, rationale, intended impact and implementation pathway.

At the same time, we recognise the wider timetable of the National Synodal Team and the need to provide material now for the next stage of the process. For that reason, we are submitting this document as a serious working contribution, while also indicating our willingness to continue meeting over the summer to refine the proposals further, if indeed the National Synodal team feels that would be helpful.

Several tensions emerged in our work. These should be seen as part of the discernment rather than as a failure of the process. The group recognised that women already give significant leadership across the Church in Ireland, including in parish life, diocesan work, pastoral planning, formation, education, communications, safeguarding, youth ministry, synodal processes and religious life. This needs to be named with gratitude and honesty.

At the same time, the group also recognised that women's leadership is not always formally recognised, supported, visible or included in decision-making structures. The issue is not simply whether women are active in the Church. They are. The deeper question is whether the Church's structures, culture, language and practice properly receive women's gifts as part of the Church's mission.

The group also noted the need to distinguish between what the Church in Ireland can act on now and what belongs to the discernment of the Universal Church. There was broad agreement that the Church in Ireland should fully use the opportunities already available in canon law for women's participation, leadership and ministry. There was also concern that questions such as women and the diaconate should remain part of ongoing Church discernment and should not be set aside. In respect of diaconal ordination there was a lack of consensus in the group.

References to the *sensus fidei* need to be used carefully. *Lumen Gentium*, *Dei Verbum* and the 2014 document of the International Theological Commission remind us that discernment must be rooted in Scripture, Tradition, the Magisterium, prayer, holiness, listening, humility and the lived faith of the People of God. This piece of the document needs refining.

The proposals offered here should therefore be read as signposts rather than as the group's final word. They point to areas where further work is needed: women in leadership and decision-making; canon law and baptismal mission; the domestic Church; women at the margins; women's ministry and the diaconate; women's visibility in liturgy, prayer and Church language; and the possible establishment of a national structure to support this work.

Draft report from the Working group on Women
submitted 16 June, with request for more time to work on these proposals, in light of the synodal nature of the group-work and the time-frame given. This is a draft, not our final report, and needs more time in the light of the Holy Spirit for reflection and fine-tuning.

Irish Synodal Pathway – Working Group Submission Template

Working Group Priority Area: [Women]
Date of Submission: [16th June 2026]
(Final submission deadline: ??)

1. Group Overview

Members:
Ms Róisín Alexander-Pye, Msgr Liam Bergin, Dr Amanda Dillon, Dr Gráinne Doherty, Bishop Kevin Doran, Ms Noelle Fitzpatrick, Mrs Janet Forbes Ms Noirín Lynch, Mr Joseph McGowan, Mrs Sinead Strong.

Convener:
[Róisín Alexander-Pye]
National Synodal Team Representative:
[Mrs Janet Forbes]

2. Statement of Discernment and Vision

(Maximum 800 words)

How we worked together:
Describe your synodal approach, including listening, prayer, discernment, dialogue, and consultation.

Each session began with prayer. Within the group there was a fundamental trust that what began as a 'formless void' would be accompanied by the Spirit (Gen 1:2). A dynamic of *parrhesia* i.e. speaking boldly, simply and with humility within the group quickly emerged. A methodology of work was characterised in general by respectful listening and conversation leading to the naming, clustering, prioritising and refining of issues and recommendations. In the process, points of learning and insight gleaned from each other were named. With robust discussion the group ultimately transcended points of disagreement by focusing on achieving the greatest good. It was recognised, with peace, that consensus would not be possible on all recommendations. The conversations in the Spirit methodology was instrumental at key moments throughout the process.

What we did:

Outline the key elements of your work (meetings, consultations, research, engagement with Baptised and Sent, etc.).

The foundational documents were circulated to each member to read/re-read, followed by initial sharing of broad thoughts/feelings on what they collectively contained.[1] Paragraph 60 of the Final Document from the universal synod together with *Baptised and Sent* became key. The group initially met every two weeks. Individual discernment shaped the focus of discussion for each meeting. With the use of google doc, each member shared three recommendations, attaching references/links to further reading that were thought helpful. During group sessions, each was presented and listened to, then clustered, and refined to eliminate overlaps. Members were invited to engage in an ongoing iterative process by dropping comments and suggestions into the live google doc. Attention was given to peripheral perspectives as well as major points of convergence, recognising that the Church is built on prophetic insight and courage that very often comes from the peripheries. The work of writing was split and shared out in groups of two, with final comment, edit and sign off by all group members.

What we heard:

Summarise the principal insights, experiences, tensions, and themes that emerged.

Principle insight: At the outset, the group named the reality that our different understandings of ministry, models of Church, God language/imagery, Mariology etc. will be deeply influenced by our personal understandings of what being 'woman' means. Some commonality of experience and understanding of 'womanhood' exists, including the important dimension of motherhood, but, there are many more dimensions and differences influenced by a wide range of determinants.[2] The need for the development of a deeper Christian anthropology was also discussed.

There was recognition that the theology integral to synodality presumes that all discernment is rooted in and grows out of lived experience. So, discernment on the call, nature, role, and vocation of women in the Church for the world, must be informed by the experience of all women.[3] The diversity in the working group, was recognised as in no way representing the breadth and depth of the diversity in the spectrum of women in modern-day Ireland or, their lived realities. This limitation informed proposals to ensure listening to women is forever embedded at every level, lending to timely and contextually appropriate action always.

Key themes: Formation, canon law and baptismal mission, culture change beyond tokenism, inclusive liturgy, ongoing listening and reflection, access to ordained ministry, decision making and structural change, oversight and accountability, justice and a preferential option for women, and deeper recognition of the role of women through the domestic Church were themes discussed.

Key points of agreement/tension: There was agreement that recommendations should address the issue of how to enable co-responsibility at every level, so that with greater credibility, the church can address the vital issues of our time giving life to the charisms of all women with consistency.

A distinction was made between the high level of women's leadership in the contributions they currently make to the Church, and the corresponding lack of decision-making/taking authority bestowed.

There was acceptance that provision already exists in canon law for an expansion and deepening of women's participation and leadership but this needs to be urgently activated, and any impediments removed.

Also, that the focus on formation needs to go beyond women, to support the dismantling of unconscious bias in everyone, at every level, promoting the mentality and spiritual disposition necessary to reflect the equality bestowed by baptism, and vital for synodality.

A point of tension was how to honour the *Sensus Fidei* that emerged through the national synthesis regarding opening the diaconate to women in Ireland, and the need for more urgent and active discernment and leadership from and within the Church in Ireland at every level on this issue.

Why these proposals:

Explain the discernment that led you to bring forward these particular proposals. (100)

Personal and group discernment led to the emergence of the themes outlined above, and the need for the continuous working out of proposals that speak directly to the concrete realities and lived experiences.

Times when the *Sensus Fidei* challenges the settled magisterial teaching have been an ongoing part of the tradition and dynamic within the Church from earliest times[4]. The proposals are founded on and give voice to the *Sensus Fidei* expressed through the Irish Synodal Pathway regarding women, cognisant also of paragraph 60 of the *Final Document* (FD) that emerged from the universal synod also regarding women. Paragraphs 90-94 of this (FD) which now forms part of official church teaching commits those in authority to action unless very compelling reasons are given not to.

Proposals are made in the spirit of (Acts 15:28) which speak to the need for the justice of the Gospels to prevail, pointing to the need for personal, cultural, systemic and structural conversion and development at every level to enable that.

Vision for the Church in Ireland:
Articulate the pastoral and missionary vision that has shaped your work.

The vision that shaped the work of the group is that which is outlined in the core documents.[5] It is a vision of deepening spiritual maturity, leading to a revitalised pastoral dynamism, in service to an outward oriented missionary Church, rooted in the love filled justice of the Gospels.

The Irish and universal synodal pathway have both persistently surfaced gratitude for the immense contribution of women but also, deep dis-ease as to the persistent injustice. This injustice is expressed through the limited visibility and voice of women in decision-making across all areas and levels of the Church. Both processes call for the conversion of structures, cultures, practices, formation, spiritualities and theologies to better recognise, incorporate and enable the gifts inherent in womanhood. Doing this will engender hope for the future, render more complete the *Imago Dei* in the Church, and pave the way for more credible and impactful expression and reception of the Gospel message.

The shift in Church language from 'equal and complementary' to 'equal and reciprocal' compels a corresponding shift toward symmetrical partnership, where gifts and not gender determine the contribution of each to the ongoing work of becoming.

The Annunciation offers a powerful model. God proposed and sought consent directly from Mary, not from male relatives or church authorities. A radical re-centring on the voice, experience and gifts of women, calling them into service not servitude, establishing a culture whereby women are looked at by everyone as ministers of God and not ministers of man is proposed. It means enabling and trusting women to dream and be given authority to evolve new ways of being Church that transcend the current vision, model and limitations.

It is impossible to credibly and adequately interpret and respond to the sign of the times with a biased-gendered perspective. Baptismal call is not gendered. This vision calls for the engagement of women as a prophetic part of Church which has, for too long resided on the peripheries, in order to co-responsibly evolve a church that is neither self-

referential, self-preserving, nor merely a sanctuary of consolation for the few, but a light, that enables flourishing of life for the many in the spirit of John 10:10.

Word Count: _____ / 800

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[1]Baptised and Sent: Preparatory Document for the Pre-Synodal Assembly Being Held in Kilkenny on 18th October 2025 (2025), Synthesis of the Consultation in Ireland for the Diocesan Stage of the Universal Synod (2022),Towards October 2024: Summary of Contributions from Dioceses and Groups of the Catholic Church in Ireland (2024), Final Document for a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission (2024). Women's Participation in the Life and Leadership of the Church -*Publication of the Final Report of Study Group No. 5*, Vatican, 10 March 2026 was not originally circulated but was referred to by the working group.

[2] For example, age, socio-economic, cultural background, sexual orientation, relationship status.
[3] Note the opening sentence of Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*: "the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the wo/men of this age... are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ"
[4] As evidenced in much of Acts of the Apostles and Paul.
[5] Baptised and Sent: Preparatory Document for the Pre-Synodal Assembly Being Held in Kilkenny on 18th October 2025 (2025), Synthesis of the Consultation in Ireland for the Diocesan Stage of the Universal Synod (2022),Towards October 2024: Summary of Contributions from Dioceses and Groups of the Catholic Church in Ireland (2024), Final Document for a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission (2024). Women's Participation in the Life and Leadership of the Church -*Publication of the Final Report of Study Group No. 5*, Vatican, 10 March 2026 was not originally circulated but was referred to by the working group.

3. Proposals for Consideration

(Minimum 3 – Maximum 7 proposals)

Proposals should be sufficiently developed to enable informed consideration by the Assembly and subsequent discernment by the Bishops' Conference.
Each proposal should be:
clear, practical, and actionable
grounded in your Working Group's discernment
attentive to the capacity, resources, and structures of the Church in Ireland at parish, diocesan, and national level
appropriately aspirational, while rooted in realistic pathways for implementation

within the competence of the Church in Ireland, recognising that some matters belong to the discernment of the Universal Church

Proposals from this group – these are more signposts than proposals at this point. They are at the service of the larger vision. We hope to fine-tune and fully complete the proposals in the next few weeks.

Proposal 1: ***Women in Leadership, Governance, Discernment and Decision-Making***

- We propose a normalisation of women and men ministering publicly together in pastoral, liturgical, ecclesial and other settings. That this normalisation be done, not by numbers but through good theological formation and grassroots practice that normalises inclusion. We need to see who God has called us all to be in action around us.
- We propose supported grassroots conversations about article 60 (of the final document) and widespread formation which offers grounding and inspiration for this commitment to inclusion.
- We propose that clear and transparent pathways for women to participate in parish, diocesan, and national leadership structures, including pastoral councils, diocesan commissions, advisory bodies, synodal teams, formation teams, and pastoral leadership roles, be established, maintained and supported by a national office (see next proposal). This process should identify and challenge blocks to this pathway.
- We propose ongoing engagement with theologians and relevant parties through events, conferences, accessible publications and constructive discussion about how we can move through this seismic culture change together, and the implications of that for the whole church in Ireland.

Description:
Rationale:
Intended Impact:
Implementation Pathway:

Proposal 2: ***Canon Law, Ministry and the Full Exercise of Baptismal Mission for Women***

From Article 60 from the final document
https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf

> 60. By virtue of Baptism, women and men have equal dignity as members of the People of God. However, women continue to encounter obstacles in obtaining a fuller recognition of their charisms, vocation and place in all the various areas of the Church's life. This is to the detriment of serving the Church's shared mission…. This Assembly asks for full implementation of all the opportunities already provided for in Canon Law with regard to the role of women, particularly in those places where they remain underutilised. There is no reason or impediment that should prevent women from carrying out leadership roles in the Church: what comes from the Holy Spirit cannot be stopped. Additionally, the question of women's access to diaconal ministry remains open. This discernment needs to continue. The Assembly also asks that more attention be given to the language and images used in preaching, teaching, catechesis, and the drafting of official Church documents, giving more space to the contributions of female saints, theologians and mystics.
> *Pope Francis and the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*

- We propose, based on article 60 of the final Synod document; that a review of the Irish implementation of canon law is immediately initiated which would identify and publish all areas where all the baptised, including women, are already called into ministry, to share their gifts and to lead. This would identify particularly any unnecessary assumptions of exclusion, and identify where inclusion is already possible and helpful for all levels of church in Ireland.
- We propose that this good news be widely shared and that, based on Article 60 and this review; a grassroots conversation is initiated in every pastoral community (religious house, parish, agency, diocese etc) about Article 60 and its implications for the life of the local parish community.
- We propose an immediate addressing of areas where the understanding and implementation of canon law in Ireland is not in line with the new developments of the international Synod and Irish synodal way.

Description:
Rationale:
Intended Impact:
Implementation Pathway:

Proposal 3: ***Women and the Domestic Church***

Within the Irish context, particular attention should be given to the domestic Church where women continue to play an indispensable role as life-givers, educators in faith, intergenerational carers, and sustainers of Christian households. The transmission of faith to future generations has depended largely on this often unseen but essential ecclesial labour.

- We propose a renewed pastoral emphasis on the domestic Church would represent not a retreat from participation in wider ecclesial life, but a deeper articulation of the Church's own sense of mission and identity (discussion of Christian anthropology referred to in introduction)
- We propose that discourse within the Church should take care to proactively validate, encourage and support women engaged in the loving care of others in the domestic realm.

  Description:
  Rationale:
  Intended Impact:
  Implementation Pathway:

Proposal 4: The Pastoral Care of Women at the Margins

Many women need specific and consistent pastoral support which parish life may not be equipped to recognise, engage with, or support.

- We propose an acknowledgement of the exclusion, struggle and dehumanisation of many women at the margins, so that we can make a preferential option for women, especially those at the margins, a normal part of church life. This includes, but is not confined to, women who experience coercive control and domestic violence, new communities or ethnic minorities vilified and under attack, trafficked women, low appreciation for mothers and those raising children in the home, women trapped in socio-economic poverty, challenges to accessing education, full time work, and equal pay.
- We propose that church communities recognise both our need to learn how to respect all, as well as our need to serve (Trócaire's balance is a good example). Partnership with agencies on the ground, including church agencies but also embracing other agencies (eg: Cuan); so that we share and live from Catholic social teaching.

Description:
Rationale:
Intended Impact:
Implementation Pathway:

Proposal 5*: Women's Ministry and Ordination to Diaconate*

While recognising that this issue ultimately belongs to the discernment of the universal Church as a whole:

- we propose that the Irish church take seriously article 60 of the final document (*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*) and advocate for ongoing exploration of the opening up of ordained ministry, including the diaconate, to women. This great concern of women and men within the Church must remain to the forefront of future discussions both within (i) every area of the Irish church, and (ii) in Irish representation at the wider level of ecclesial discernment. Bishops, in particular, must use their role and influence to encourage discussion and education both nationally and internationally. Such advocacy needs to be theologically informed by *current* theology and ecclesiology – with particular emphasis on female theologians who have researched, reflected, and written on the history, tradition, and role of ordained ministry.
- We propose that conversations about the ordination of women be considered in any discussion on the opening up of all ministry in general to women, so that as we open what is now possible, we are also continuing the conversation about what may be.

Description:
Rationale:
Intended Impact:
Implementation Pathway:

Proposal 6: *Women Visible and Valued in Liturgy, Public Prayer and the Discourse of Faith.*

- We propose that women, and women's voices, be visible, heard, and valued in liturgy and public prayer at all levels of the Irish church so that women and girls experience themselves as included and respected in their full humanity, and thereby know themselves as full members, called and chosen.

- We propose that all church members and leaders are given the opportunity, education and information to recognise women and girls as full participants in the Good News and in the life of the Church.
- We propose that inclusion becomes the norm not the aspiration at every level. In terms of liturgy and public prayer, this requires a thorough and systematic examination and correction of texts, hymnals, and other materials that do not recognise the baptismal dignity of all persons.
- We propose that the language of the Divine Feminine, as expressed throughout our Scriptures, and by women saints, mystics, and scholars be proactively rediscovered and normalised as expressions of God.
- We propose, in order to rebalance our Church's unconscious bias; that a liturgical season, namely the Easter Season, be upheld as a season of special focus in which we highlight the discipleship of women by: centering the women of our Scriptures who proclaimed Christ; the wisdom of the holy women, mystics and saints of our tradition, as well as contemporary women's voices, experience, gift sharing, and leadership at all levels of church.

  Description:
  Rationale:
  Intended Impact:
  Implementation Pathway:

Proposal 7: A National Office for Women (Mainstreaming women's inclusion)

- Given the breadth of this area of work, we propose the establishment of a national office with an oversight role to support root and branch culture change, which would enable the full participation of women in line with the equal dignity bestowed by baptism and recognized in the Synodal documents.
- We propose that this national office be a witness to the Irish church's communal commitment at parish and diocesan level to the full inclusion of women. Therefore, this national office will be located at the level of the bishops' conference, well-resourced, and have clear lines of management and of authority.
    - That this office would support national agencies and committees in implementing this work
    - That it would develop clear procedures and resources to support grassroots engagement, from discussion to employment, ministry to formation

- That it would offer periodic reports and timely assessments on impediments and opportunities for the full engagement of women

Description:
Rationale:
Intended Impact:
Implementation Pathway:

Final Declaration

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