

But the Lord Looks on the Heart: Part 2.
International voices from the Church of Ireland
parishes of Dublin & Glendalough



Anne Lodge

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But Ruth said,

“Do not press me to leave you, to turn back from following you!

**Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people and your God my God.**

¹⁷ Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried.

**May the LORD do thus to me, and more as well,
if even death parts me from you!”**

(Ruth 1: 16-17)



(Kings 2020: 82)

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I am very grateful to the staff of the diocesan office for their support and their professionalism. I remain very grateful to archbishop Michael Jackson, who has enabled me to undertake this follow-up study as part of my self-supporting ministry in the diocese so that, as with earlier work, this research was undertaken at no cost to the United Dioceses.

Anne Lodge

Table of Contents

Title	Page
Acknowledgements	2
Table of Contents	3
Foreword by archbishop Michael Jackson	4
Chapter 1 <i>Introduction and Context</i>	5
Chapter 2 <i>The Study</i>	9
Chapter 3 <i>Voices from the Parishes</i>	13
<i>Section A: What attracted the respondents to worship</i>	
<i>In the parish?</i>	13
<i>Section B: What has supported them to stay in the</i>	
<i>parish?</i>	15
<i>Section C: What parish roles have they</i>	
<i>undertaken and how have these come about?</i>	22
<i>Section D: What is working well for newcomers to</i>	
<i>the parish who have come from overseas?</i>	26
<i>Section E: What might the parish do differently or</i>	
<i>better to welcome & include newcomers</i>	
<i>from overseas to the parish?</i>	32
<i>Section F: What advice or good example can this</i>	
<i>parish give to the United Dioceses about</i>	
<i>welcoming & including newcomers from overseas?</i>	34
Summary of findings	35
Chapter 4 <i>Visits to Parish Outreach Initiatives</i>	38
Chapter 5 <i>Learning from the Book of Ruth</i>	42
Chapter 6 <i>Conclusions and Recommendations</i>	48
Final recommendations	50
Bibliography	51

Foreword by archbishop Michael Jackson


The term *parish* has never been the exclusive preserve of any church. Parish has both a civic and a Christian meaning and resonance in our society. Parishioners, those who live in a defined area, have responsibility for others and particularly for those who are new to the parish, new to any parish. Those who are already established hold the key that opens the window of understanding and unlocks the door of belonging to the new neighbour. Such a responsibility is an adventure of accompaniment where all who walk together are given the invitation to change and to be changed by their experiences. The simplest of local initiatives provides a point of entry into a shared global identity for all.

This study offers a number of pointers and signposts as to how this can happen. It does so from documented examples within parishes of the Church of Ireland United Dioceses of Dublin and Glendalough where transformation and inclusion are already taking place. It honours and celebrates what communities have done locally to enrich and to enlarge inherited community. In so doing, it draws to the foreground of the reader's imagination what is possible on the part of all of us, precisely because it is already happening - parochially. It is within our grasp. Shifts in expectation lead to shifts in relationships and shifts in outcome.

In reading this study, I ask that you pay particular attention to the voices of participants. Their courage and conviction, their faith in God, in themselves and in the future are the primary evidence that makes possible any assessment and any recommendation. Their reasons for being in Ireland are private, complicated and sometimes excruciatingly painful. Front and centre in their voices are the combined energy of open-hearted welcome and care, being entrusted with responsibility and sustained belonging. This three-stage journey asks the fourth question of the diocese and the parishes: How can those who have moved in their self-understanding from being recipients of care to being givers of care be integrated into the full range of lay and ordained ministries in the diocese where they are eager to serve alongside their neighbours? How will the diocese hear their voice? We see in what they say that the simplest sharing builds family belonging. These voices are the voices of today and of tomorrow – here and now.

The analysis is twofold. First, it points the reader towards becoming part of an urgent re-set of priority of activity in the post-Covid times. It recognizes the pivotal role of both incumbent and parishioner in understanding that care for neighbour is itself a gift in two directions. Care is not a bargaining chip of conversion. Care is a shared opportunity for self-understanding leading to self-expression in which the recipient is God's gift of self. Secondly, it points the reader towards an understanding of parish from deep within the Judaeo-Christian tradition of the *Book of Ruth*. All the main characters enable us, centuries later, to understand inclusion and independence as part of God's redemptive plan for neighbours seen and unseen.

My thanks go to The Reverend Professor Anne Lodge for initiating and conducting this study as part of her Self-Supporting Ministry in the diocese, to all participants and parishes for engaging so energetically in it. Not only does it show us what can be done. It shows us what is being done. And we are the better for it on both counts.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Jackson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a horizontal line above the name.

Chapter 1 – Introduction and Context

In October 2020 we launched the first part of this report which described the outcomes of a survey of parish incumbents about cultural diversity and presence of international people in their parishes. This survey was an updated version of the original survey undertaken in 2005 for the *Welcoming Angels* report. The 2020 report outlined the extent to which cultural diversity was now embedded in a significant minority of parishes in Dublin & Glendalough. It also indicated the global nature of the cultural diversity that makes up Anglicanism in our United Dioceses. Among the recommendations made in that report was the need to follow up the initial survey to hear the voices of some of those international people who belong to our parishes. *But the Lord Looks on the Heart, part 2* gives voice to the insights and experiences of some of our fellow Anglicans of international origin. This report also details visits to two parish support activities and commitments to newcomers in their localities, many of who have fled from places of conflict.

Context for the Study

Passarelli (2012) published an interesting study on the experience of migrants in Irish Anglican and Methodist churches in Dublin. She explored how important religion is in the lives of migrants, why they choose a particular church, how easy, or difficult it is for them to become involved in their church and to assume leadership roles in their church. She considered the role that churches play as a substitute family for newcomers and how they can support their integration into life in Ireland. The questions she asked are very similar to those which we posed in our study a decade later. She found that genuinely inclusive church congregations were very important for newcomers as part of their efforts to build a new life in their place of arrival. They provided a sense of integrated community, giving the newcomers skills and confidence to engage actively in other aspects of Irish society.

Passarelli's findings from Ireland are mirrored in studies elsewhere in the Anglican world. For example, Short (2015) interviewed people from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds in three rural Anglican churches in Australia. Among the findings were that faith is a very important part of migrants' identities and they were keen to connect with church as a familiar place when they left home and moved to a new country. Those who migrate to a new country

can find the experience both confusing and isolating. Church is something familiar that can provide a link to home and can offer a place of certainty, support and friendship. Church in the place of arrival not only connects the migrants to God and to others of shared faith, but also provides a safe space potentially giving a window into the new society and its culture. Where real efforts are made by churches to respectfully include newcomers, both the migrants and the indigenous community members benefit from the resultant relationships. The newcomers particularly benefit when they move from being solely seen as recipients of help to being active contributors to their parish.

Marsh (2022) conducted a study of cultural inclusion and attitudes in a multicultural Methodist congregation in the UK. Marsh reported that while many of the older, indigenous congregation members were welcoming, positive and friendly towards newcomers, they neither saw their fellow-congregants as British nor did they see them as having gifts to offer to the worshipping committee, especially in leadership roles. Marsh explains that parish ministerial teams had a very significant role to play in building trusting and respectful relationships of equals between different cultural groups through ensuring social mixing. They also engaged in intentional mixing of smaller pastoral and planning groups to build relationships, understanding and respect and to ensure that the gifts of all members of the congregation were recognised and utilised. The structural use of small groups for activities such as Bible Study and prayer groups as well as hospitality and fellowship is recognised as strengthening respectful community relationships and building discipleship (Hussey 2020).

Short (2015) argues that respectful inclusion of newcomers has the potential to grow churches and to develop discipleship of all members of the parish and church community. Orellana (2021) reports that cultural diversity and pluralism in a Chilean parish are found to contribute positively to strengthening individual beliefs. With supportive leadership and a willingness by congregations to take the risk presented by change, Shubin (2012) argues that both the indigenous parish community and the community's new members can collectively experience spiritual learning, cultural mixing and positive growth.

The literature tells us that church can provide an essential support for international persons who migrate to a new country and can play an important role in their integration into their

society of arrival. The literature also tells us that local initiatives can be more successful in their individual, specific contexts, while top-down initiatives may not either have the trickle-down effect that planners hope for and may also be easier for the cynical or the unconvinced to undermine. To return to Dublin, Passarelli (2012) gives us an insight into the relative success or otherwise of the two different models of integration that she found in Dublin. In the Methodist church, the approach was locally-led and left to individual congregations, meaning that it was more successful in some locations than others and also meaning that it depended on continuing local commitment. The Church of Ireland opted for a top-down diocesan initiative, the *Discovery Programme*. Passarelli (2012) argues that, at the time of her study, *Discovery* had limited impact on changing attitudes in individual congregations – during the time of her study she found that local attitudes had actually become less welcoming. Further, the programme did not facilitate migrants in taking up leadership positions and it meant that many newcomers opted instead for migrant-led churches.

In April 2021, the Church of England Archbishops' Anti-Racism Taskforce published *From Lament to Action*. Several of its key recommendations addressed the need for structural change so that a variety of church leadership roles would be inclusive of those of a range of culturally diverse backgrounds. It recommended the appointment of Racial Diversity Officers. Isiorho (2021), in an editorial to *Black Theology*, expressed concerns that the top-down nature of the recommendations meant that the existing democratic structures within the Church of England would find it quite easy to undermine or prevent the recommendations being carried out. He noted how General Synod had already voted down one of its recommendations regarding the appointment of Racial Diversity Officers. Top-down change does not easily change attitudes. The taskforce report (2021) also recommended that future studies undertaken by this taskforce would explore cultures and attitudes at parish level to ensure a deeper and more inclusive understanding of, and engagement with cultural diversity. Without such understanding and change, top-down initiatives are far less likely to succeed.

What is it that drives an unwillingness to embrace change and include the newcomer? Fear of change and of dilution of a church culture already in a minority in an increasingly secular society can be a key reason why parish communities do not embrace the opportunities for both numerical and spiritual growth that newcomers bring with them. While it is very

important to understand the drivers behind fear of change, it is every bit as important to understand positive dynamics at play in locations and institutions where people positively embrace change, and actively include and welcome newcomers.

Our interest in this second part of the study *But the Lord Looks on the Heart* is to explore and understand the dynamics at work in individual parishes which reported higher proportions of international persons compared with other parishes in the United Dioceses of Dublin & Glendalough. We wished to understand the experiences of those who arrived as newcomers to these parishes and to explore why they chose to stay in those parishes and to become actively involved. We also wished to offer their recommendations to their parishes and to the United Dioceses to facilitate further positive inclusion.

Outline of the Report

This report has five further sections. The second chapter outlines the methods used in this study and describes the sample anonymised parishes and the participants in the focus groups. It also describes the visits to two other anonymised sample parishes to explore initiatives they have to support newcomers to Ireland seeking refuge from conflict or other calamity. The third chapter presents the findings from the six focus group discussions. The fourth chapter describes the visits to the two other parishes where support activities are taking place. The fifth chapter analyses the findings through the scriptural lens of the *Book of Ruth*. The final section concludes with a short summary of the findings from this study and presents a number of over-arching recommendations that emerge from those findings.

Chapter 2 - The Study

We visited six sample parishes in summer 2022, all of which had responded to the 2020 survey about cultural diversity and presence of international persons in the congregations, and all of which had indicated that there was a relatively high proportion of such cultural diversity. The parishes were also selected in order to represent the range of experience across the United Dioceses. One of the parishes has well-established blend of traditional worship and fresh expression while the other five have a more uniformly traditional approach to worship. All six parishes have an online presence and broadcast worship during and after Covid. There were:

- two parishes located in newer and more culturally diverse outer suburbs of Dublin (A & E)
- two parishes located in satellite towns, one to the north and the other to the south of the capital (B & C)
- two parishes located in older and more affluent suburbs of Dublin (D & F)

A total of 31 respondents took part in the focus groups across the six parishes. The focus groups varied in size from three participants to ten. In some cases, all those invited were able to attend, in other cases individuals were unavailable. The countries of origin of those who took part in the focus groups are outlined overleaf in Table 1. There were 13 different nationalities represented from across the world.

Table 1 – Nationality of origin of focus group participants

Nationality of Origin	Parish A	Parish B	Parish C	Parish D	Parish E	Parish F	TOTAL
Argentina						2	2
Cameroon	1	1					2
Croatia				1			1
India				2	4	1	7
Kenya					1		1
Malaysia		2					2
Nigeria	2		1	1	5		9
Philippines				1			1
Russia						1	1
South Africa	1						1
Sweden			1				1
Uganda						1	1
Zimbabwe		1	1				2

Some of those who attended the focus groups were, at the time the focus groups took place, long-standing members of the parishes in which they worshipped, while others had been there for a shorter period of time. Some respondents had experienced two or three different incumbents while others only knew one ministerial team or individual in their current place of worship. As Table 2 below indicates, four fifths of the participants had been actively engaged for 6 years or more in their current parish with almost half having more than a decade of experience of their current parish.

Table 2 – Number of years focus group participants have been members of their parish

# of years in the current parish	Parish A	Parish B	Parish C	Parish D	Parish E	Parish F	TOTAL
1 or less			1			2	3
2 – 5	1			1		1	3
6 – 10		2	2	4	1	2	11
11 – 15	1	1			7		9
16 – 20	2	1			2		5

Over half of the respondents in the six focus groups were over the age of 40, some with grownup children and a few with grandchildren. Just over a third were young, either single people or young parents.

The focus groups

An invitation was issued to the incumbents of the six parishes to support the research. They were asked to pass on an invitation to long-standing, active members of their parishes who were originally of overseas origin. In each case, the incumbents extended this invitation to parishioners who were of international origin, and were established and in some way active in the parish.

The six questions were shared with the incumbents who were invited to share those in turn with possible focus group participants. The questions were:

1. *What attracted the respondents to worship in the parish?*
2. *What has supported them to stay in the parish?*
3. *What roles have they undertaken and how have these come about?*
4. *What is working well for newcomers to the parish who have come from overseas?*
5. *What might the parish do differently or better to welcome and include newcomers from overseas to the parish, in their opinions?*
6. *What advice or good example can this parish give to the United Dioceses about welcoming and including newcomers from overseas?*

In most cases, the researchers met with the focus group members alone, though in two cases, lay members of the parish attended in order to support the event by opening a venue, providing refreshments and technological support. Focus group participants were provided with a plain language statement and a permission form which they were invited to sign if willing, to allow the researcher to record the discussion to support the completion of this research. The recordings were subsequently transcribed. Both the recordings and transcriptions have been accessed solely by the researcher.

All six meetings took place during July 2022. Individual summary reports have been completed for each parish and are confidential to that parish.

Visits to parishes supporting Ukrainian displaced persons, residents of a Direct Provision Centre and Refugees

The research also featured visits to two further parishes engaged in support activities to meet local needs. The first parish, which is in an outer suburb, partnered with other local parishes of various denominations to provide a one-week Summer Camp for the Ukrainian residents of a local hotel early in the summer. Members of the parish, as well as parishioners from other nearby Church of Ireland parishes, supported the Summer Camp. We met with the incumbent and had a tour of the Parish Centre and an in-depth description of the one-week Summer Camp. Materials produced by those who took part in the camp remained on display in the Parish Centre and were shared with us.

The second parish, which is in a rural area, has been supporting a local Direct Provision Centre for several years. We visited with the local minister during the Centre's Open Day and met with many of the residents there as well as some returning past residents. We did not interview them but had informal conversations with them because we were very aware of the power differential and sensitivities in this regard and had a key interest in protecting their confidentiality.

Our key focus on both visits was to get an insight into the way in which the parish offered support to newcomers to Ireland who had left their home countries in challenging circumstances and were now being housed by, or on behalf of the Irish State. We were also interested in understanding the underpinning motivations for each parish in its outreach actions.

Chapter 3 - Voices from the Parishes

This section reports on the pattern of responses across the six focus groups to each of the questions asked.

Section A: What attracted the respondents to worship in the parish?

Church of Ireland parish as an Anglican link with home

In each of the focus groups, respondents described moving to an area and seeking out a church. Some specifically sought the closest Anglican church while others were more particular about finding a church that suited their faith expression and style of worship.

We came to Dublin X area, we live in [suburb] we tried to find out where is the nearest Anglican church where we could worship and I think a friend of mine said we have one in [suburb]. Then we came to [suburb] and that was how we came to the church.

The majority of the focus group participants had been brought up in the Anglican tradition in their countries of origin or what we describe as Anglican-adjacent (e.g. Methodist, Lutheran).

I am an Anglican. My parents are also Anglican. I am from an Anglican identity. The church is Anglican.

My own family from my mother's side, we used to go to a church United Congregation Church of South Africa, but we couldn't identify any church here. So, we kind of were looking for Anglican church.

Most of these respondents sought a church when they moved to Ireland that was familiar and which, in that familiarity, offered a link with home.

The reason to come to this church. When I came in here, my friend was here before, so she introduced me to this church. I came along with her, so it's the same back home. We belong to Church of India. Same subject, same songs, everything. So that made me to stay here.

At home we had church and the Boys and Girls Brigade. Just like here.

Low visibility of Church of Ireland churches

Some of the respondents had moved from one parish to another in Ireland but each time had sought an Anglican church in which to worship. In different focus groups, we heard how challenging it could be in suburbs and towns to locate the Anglican church due to a lack of local signposting and the absence of the churches from google maps.

When I came to [suburb] it took me a while to find the Church of Ireland. We went around on Sundays with my kids. Sometimes we went to other churches. This church is not on google maps. It is really hard to find this place.

When I moved to [town] it took me a while to find a church.

However, not everyone is choosing to move church so as to worship close to home. In individual cases, members of focus groups described how they have moved house but are continuing to commute weekly to the church that made them so welcome because it feels like family to them.

I like the people and one thing is that when I came to Dublin, or Ireland like, I don't have any friend, no friends, no family. So this is where I met everyone..... Like I stay in a different part like [suburb]. But still I come here.

I think the whole church and everybody is very warm and well supporting. There's a moral support and they help, it's like an extended family to be honest. Yes, like extended family.

Choosing a place of worship based on expressed faith and values

Two of the respondents had originally been Roman Catholic, two Baptist, one a Buddhist, while one other had an unchurched upbringing. Each of these described their choice of the parish as being about finding a specific place and community that reflected their own faith journey and was a good match with their own values. Church messaging either on banners outside the building or on the parish website were important for this minority of respondents in their search for an appropriate faith community.

And the other thing is a solid Christian message.

When we knew that we were coming to Ireland, we started looking on the internet for churches here. And before our friend recommended this church, we saw [church] on the internet and we said, this might be a nice church to visit. So it was our choice as well.

Section B: What has supported them to stay in the parish?

Initial welcome and ongoing welcome

In all six focus groups the openness of both the initial welcome and the ongoing friendliness of parishioners and clergy was commented on. While the initial welcome was important, it was the building of relationships that really mattered. In all six focus groups, the participants described the friendliness and care of the incumbent or the ministry team as being really important. The incumbent knew their name. The incumbent was responsive to need e.g. where there was illness or a bereavement, especially when a family death happened in their home of origin and they could not return for the funeral. The incumbent was willing to socially engage with them, e.g. to attend a birthday party or celebration of baptism. This spoke volumes to the participants about the respect that the incumbent had for them as newcomers.

And then one thing I also like about [incumbent] is he remembers everyone's story. And he's very personal. So, he'll remember each individual story.

[Incumbent] takes time and she remembers each and everything. She contacts you personally and remembers things we say, she just leaves us a text saying that and even now she asked for, she remembers my son's name and she texts us back like what he's doing, how we are coping up and everything.

To be honest, it was [the incumbent's] personality, her attitude to people. And in the work that she's doing in general.

I got really good support from [the incumbent] as well. She visited me a few times and then yeah, she's really, really, really, good to support in many ways.

I think when we came in, I think the first thing we had is that we were welcomed after the church service. We put down our name and address where we live, and then we got a visit from the rector who was then in charge. So, that was very encouraging. That was very good. He came and had a cup of tea with us at our house, and then we prayed and then we talked about the experiences about coming to Ireland and what we do. So, that was good. So, we felt welcomed.

Welcome from within the congregation

Participants talked about how important individual parishioners were and are in helping to integrate new people into the community. In some instances, the welcomers had a formal role in the parish, such as church warden, or designated welcomer. In other cases, the culture

of friendliness was the result of the personal commitment by an individual or individuals to ensure that all were welcome and included.

And the reason why I stayed was because of the welcome that I received from everybody. You would come into church, I'm not very good with names. So I would come in and the next thing you're being pulled into a hug and you're thinking, "Okay, now. Who is this again?" Yeah. But everybody was just so loving. And so you are one of us. And for me, that was really weird and strange, but it made me stay. And then with time as well, I got involved with other things. I remember within the first few years I had the keys to the gate and I was locking up and opening up on a Saturday morning. And it was a new experience for me. But just that level of trust and being pulled in, it made me to stay.

Participants also talked warmly about those parishioners who noticed when they had missed a Sunday or two and asked how they were and made a point of welcoming them back after an absence. This sense of welcome also included practical help and support.

So, once I miss a weekend and the next Sunday somebody is asking, "Oh, we didn't see you last Sunday." I say, "Well, is because the bills have to be paid." So, the good interpersonal relationship and great people skills that we've received in the parish.

Participants spoke warmly about fellow members of the parish who were generous in offering lifts to or from church for example to people who were dependent on public transport and may have been travelling some distance.

And whenever my kids and I were at the bus stop waiting for the bus, [parishioner] would stop and ask to take us home. I used to think she lived [near us in a particular suburb]. No, no, she lived in [a different suburb].

Hospitality

Hospitality after services was also noted as a very important part of the building of relationships in the parish community. Having what one participant called 'a good tea' really made a difference to newcomers' ability to talk to others, to learn names, to become part of the group.

Well maybe this tea and it's a good one. Because if the opportunity to have a tea with a new person who gets another person. I mean, it's a way, you see a new person, you tell them there's tea after the church, they want to get to know other people, they want to come around, I mean it's a good one.

Covid had impacted considerably on the provision of hospitality, something that various focus groups talked about. One group explained how, even though the parish could not provide tea after the service, the congregation invited as many people as wished to go to the local

garden centre for refreshment after their Sunday service. This opportunity to build relationships was really appreciated.

People are very friendly. Particularly the one in [town], I didn't know anybody. But they were so welcoming. Like after the service we'd go for tea and coffee and we went to that place, what's it called, {name} Garden Centre, it was really nice you know. Actually, [my son] made a friend and now they're together in school. That's really what kept me going. But I feel like it's a welcoming space.

Quality of preaching and prayer

While welcome was important, it was only one of a number of key factors that attracted the participants to remain in the parish. In every focus group, we heard about the importance of good preaching and a strong sense that people listened and then continued to reflect on the unfolding of scripture afterwards.

The preaching as well. I mean, somehow, it reflects a lot of things. I mean, once you come into the church, you get the words, you'd go back home, reflect on it and meditate on the words, and it has sown a great fruit in my life and I tell you, I'm happy and I continue to be happier to be in the church.

Some participants talked about how important it was that their incumbent preached about the reality of life not just in Ireland but in the world, and appreciated when global events were talked about in conjunction with scripture.

I notice, I know that it's conscious effort which the rectors have put in is the fact that the sermons reflect the diversity. So, when you're talking to the parishioners the rectors have made it important to say things that chimes, like saying, it's everybody in the audience. It's not just using examples from Ireland, but you reflect things happening elsewhere. That also I think is really important, the fact that things are happening in Ukraine there maybe possibly Ukrainians in the audience. Examples, illustrations from other cultures, the new cultures that's also, I find that very inspiring. And also I think that that allows other people to feel that connection. They know we are here and that's reflected in what's been said.

Equally, they valued the incumbent's approach to the ministry of prayer.

Yeah, the best thing in the church, which is what actually welcomed us, and they say [the incumbent] is really, really welcoming. You don't feel left out, which even now included in the prayers, like praise God. It's interactive, so you feel kind of closer.

For many of these participants, their sense that the incumbent in their parish was a woman or man of God was really important to them. They regarded their incumbents as people of faith whose discipleship was expressed through preaching and prayer. This in turn informs their respect for and inclusion of everyone. Such a positive attitude and spirit impacted those

in the congregation as well. Two participants in one focus group said the following about their current and previous incumbents, and their impact on the congregation:

Okay. [Incumbent 1]and [Incumbent 2] are very, very open. Yeah. They just very open. They don't put anyone down like...They are just open. They treat you like another human. Just open. That's what I wanted to say, that I had the impression that spirit of being open is spread in the whole church, the whole parish, because I started noticing the same behavior from everybody, this openness.

Respect for cultural diversity

What was also clearly important was the openness of the parish incumbent to recognise and respect the cultures of those of international origin. As noted above, in a number of parishes, individual participants talked about how important it was to them that the rector integrated elements of their experience or concern for their home place into preaching. Sermons could also be used as a way of drawing all members of the congregation into involvement in the parish. In one focus group, a participant talked about how the incumbent used preaching to call people to volunteer to get involved.

With the church cleaning and the Bible reading that was [the incumbent]. She did a sermon one day about service. She was talking about how we should serve and also be willing to receive service. It should be like a circle. And at the end of it, she just put it out there to say, "If people would like to do anything for the church, please come to me. Because there is lots to be done, but not everybody is doing."

In another parish, a number of participants praised the incumbent for his openness to learn words and prayers in their languages, to learn their traditions and to integrate these as appropriate into the life of the community and even into worship. They talked about how he was open to using an Indian greeting as a new way of sharing the peace during Covid restrictions.

The Minister respect everyone, a good learning culture. And recently we started, the peace be with you, [demonstrates Indian style hands together and bow head] like we say like that in India. Start that. So that was a great one. So everybody likes that, and so no more handshake.

They felt that this openly demonstrated and modelled his respect for all the cultures in the congregation.

They don't see us as immigrants or whatever. The Minister is very nice. Anything we go to him for, he's ready assist in.

In another parish, they set up a Spanish-language prayer group of Venezuelan people and also used Spanish for the screens in the church:

But the church was very eager to listen to those needs and do something about it. So for example, we have started a prayer group only in Spanish, because there were many Spanish-speaking people and that lasted for a year, and then after a year, that wasn't needed because people really managing this much better, so they didn't need that the particular group of Spanish-speaking people.

Even sometimes we have Spanish words on the screen with the Venezuelan integration at one point or Ukrainian. I remember Ukrainian words of welcoming as well, so I think it makes people feel very welcome and that's very special.

Faith, values and style of the community of worship

As noted earlier, the statement and expression of the faith and values of the parish as a community of worship was very important to some newcomers who actively sought out a church that matched their values.

The other thing is a solid Christian message

Other factors connected to the lived values were also significant. These included was the more intimate size of typical Church of Ireland congregations which made it easier to make connections and get involved.

It felt a little bit different because I know I was saying earlier where I went to church in London in Holy Trinity Brompton, it's quite big, you went to church and like everyone else, two or three, four, 500 people who go there every Sunday. ... Most of the churches I've gone to have always been big churches, even back home is quite big where you're just part of that bigger community. But here, if it was like there's still that personal thing attached to it. Yeah.

It's a very homely place to be honest.

A degree of flexibility of culture in the parish also mattered. There was also a comment from one of the groups that welcome and inclusion meant an openness to change.

Changing culture of the congregation: ...I also know that when I joined, so eight years ago, since then, our parish has changed a lot. And it has become a lot more dynamic. And I believe a little more welcoming. And it really, really shows where maybe some [inaudible 00:16:29] who are open and chatty, and ask questions, and you know. And it's so important to have the rector there as well and saying hello to everyone. But also, I think the parish is not threatened. The people who have been here much longer than me, they're not threatened by us to see us as... We bring something positive, I think, to the church. So I'm willing to serve and give-

There was an interesting age difference in their response to more traditional styles of worship and music. Some of the younger respondents had chosen a parish with non-traditional worship and music and very interactive services.

I also very, very much like the contemporary service. I don't think I would've stayed as long in church if the service was different. And the songs are an essential part of that. I feel like if there weren't songs, it wouldn't be the same for me. For me, the fact that the service is one hour and I don't realize it. I think it's because also it's very interactive with many, many songs.

However, other younger participants remained in their local parish but wished that a wider variety of music might be chosen, a mix of new style music with the traditional.

I feel like the hymns, they're very... But that's just me being young and wanting to have good music in the church.... To be honest, it's probably just the style of the way the church is and how the history of how the hymns are. The members of the church are used to that. Compared to the music I listen to, I feel like it'd be nice to have a little more raves and dancing and lively music.

Many of the older focus group participants loved the Anglican hymns that we typically sing in the Church of Ireland and that were also in very common use in their churches of origin and an important reminder of home.

I said for family reasons and that's remembering my mother and what I was doing at home was just reading the Hymns Ancient and Modern, that's the Anglican songs book to myself and my family.

Children's and youth ministry

For those participants who had children, the type of children's ministry in the parish and the welcome for children was a significant factor.

The other thing, I suppose, is the family service. You know when they include everyone and the kids? That works very well. [My young son] is shouting all the answers and standing up. I think that's really good to get them to engage. Kids engage and interact. He loves it.

My daughter likes the Sunday School too.

We saw that they had a focus on children and it was a very important part for us as well.

Then with a Sunday club, some people got children, you can put them in activity.

And that was that, for me, I needed a church that would not shush my children or that would not ask them to be model citizens because they're not.

However, worries were expressed by parents of older children and young adults in several focus groups that there was little or no provision for post-confirmation young people in the parishes.

If you want to have the new generation, we are talking mainly about adults coming from somewhere here. But if you want to build new generation because the old generation is getting older, we want the new generation, new kids, a lot kids in the church growing up from Sunday school up to the one.

It's unfortunate we don't have so many young people. Now, we reach a stage, most of our teenagers have grown. So it's like now we just have this gap. And it's a phase every single time. I know it's hard, but I know the young people are not coming because of the sports and I would really wish we had a way of reaching them... And even, we do the Sunday school, yes, but I wish we could have a Bible study for the younger generation, like the younger one, the one we have on Tuesdays.

Because what I've noticed with Sunday school, when they reach a certain stage, we don't have any space for them. And that's how most of them, they dropout. They can't be coming to church every single time

It was acknowledged that youth clubs and groups had suffered as a result of Covid and that traditional worship or church activities may not necessarily be appealing to youth.

I know the numbers are down now because of the COVID.

The demographic of the church, but my focus, the age focus, is slightly different. So I would say between the ages of 18 to 40. We don't really add a lot in that group. So if there was something we could do to attract.... Because like I said, I mentioned the [other named church with fresh expression service] they are a younger set, I understand, because my previous college, Trinity College. They are also there, so I can see most of that age group will be going to that church.

Concerns were expressed in one focus group about how the younger generation had lost touch with some important aspects of their culture of origin and there was a desire to seek support for this in a church community with other international parents.

So if we have a platform to discuss these things, because we all seem to have challenges bringing up children in this country, and to show them the big way of going, of living.

Section C: What parish roles have they undertaken and how have these roles come about?

Range of engagement

Almost all those involved in the six focus groups were actively engaged in their parish community. The range of current and previous activities and responsibilities listed by participants included:

- (i) Readers' Rota
- (ii) Tea/Coffee Rota
- (iii) Cleaning the church / church grounds
- (iv) Welcoming
- (v) Membership of the Select Vestry
- (vi) Rector's or People's Church Warden
- (vii) Children's ministry
- (viii) Youth ministry
- (ix) Choir
- (x) Music ministry
- (xi) IT support for services
- (xii) Streaming of services on the internet
- (xiii) Responsibility for keys and locking / unlocking of church and parish hall
- (xiv) Parish Newsletter
- (xv) Parish Prayer group
- (xvi) Parish Needs group
- (xvii) Parish Bible Studies group
- (xviii) Running a stall or refreshments at annual Parish Fair
- (xix) Parish hospitality events
- (xx) Parish fundraising initiatives for charities or identified needs
- (xxi) Involvement in parish primary school activities

Willingness to serve

Participants in all focus groups also indicated a willingness to undertake other roles if they were asked to volunteer. Some made it clear that they always offered to help.

I volunteered. I volunteered. Always.

I'm always happy to help at the end of the day.

Those who had come from other parishes mentioned the roles that they had taken in their previous communities indicating that they always became actively involved wherever they worshipped.

Cleaning the church grounds, clearing the bushes. Doing the tea, washing the cups and everything.

Some had approached the incumbent or ministry team to volunteer for their roles, others had been asked to take on tasks or had been elected by the parish e.g. to Select Vestry or as People's Church Warden. While all were willing to take on formal roles, there was also a willingness to help the parish, the incumbent or other members of the parish through informal activity.

I just wanted to volunteer and ask them if I can do something.

One participant explained that her willingness to be involved in serving the church reflected her desire to challenge and extend her own discipleship.

What I loved about this church was those numerous points of engagement for me and I was looking for a relationship, I was also looking to grow in my faith. I was looking to extend and push boundaries on my faith, and also to make an impact. So I was involved from the needs group to the Wednesday morning church, I attended everything under the sun and then I was invited to sit on the Select Vestry and then I was Church Warden and things like that. These actually helped me establish this kind of sense of service that I really wanted to have an avenue to express it and it gave me a multitude of that.

Those in receipt of care become the carers

The generosity of the incumbent and by other members of the community in offering help, care and support was noted across the focus groups as a very important reason international people felt welcome and valued. Taking on of roles, formal or informal, was perceived as offering an opportunity for individuals who had arrived to the parish to move from being the recipients of care and support to being part of the community that offered care and support to others. In one of the focus groups those who had been newcomers less than a decade before were now taking an informal role of welcoming upon themselves to ensure that more recent newcomers had a proper chance to be included. They talked about how important welcoming is at the end of the service as well as the beginning. They described sharing out among themselves the task of inviting and accompanying anyone new to tea after the service.

Definitely, first time here, they will be asking me, " Can I have a tea?" So now I say I know this is a new one and they come into this, we always stop together and someone will be going to the new person, do you want to have a chat with a tea and coffee and something like that. So at least somebody's going to have a chat with them at tea-time.

Inclusion through roles of responsibility

Taking on roles and responsibilities in the parish (particularly where individuals were asked to volunteer or were elected by their fellow parishioners) signified acceptance and inclusion by the community for many participants. One focus group participant described how, early in her time in the parish and in Ireland, the incumbent had asked her to take on the important responsibility as key-holder for church and hall. She described how important this was to her because she felt trusted and respected.

I remember within the first few years I had the keys to the gate and I was locking up and opening up on a Saturday morning. And it was a new experience for me. But just that level of trust and being pulled in, it made me want to stay.

An interesting aspect of this story, which had meant so much to the individual involved, was that the previous incumbent, when asked by the researcher about this, could not remember any specific details. This meant that, for him, to involve someone, to give them responsibility and the resultant respect, was so normal that it did not stand out at all a decade later.

Individual focus group participants talked about how willing they were to be invited to take up the role and to be appointed as Rector's Church Warden.

After two years he had now told me that he would like me to be the Rector's Warden. And I said, "Okay, if that is your wish, I'm prepared to give myself that opportunity to serve." And I remain his Warden.

It was equally appreciated when fellow parishioners backed someone from the international community for the role of Church Warden.

The parishioner just mentioned no, [Name] should go for the Church Warden, there's a space. Would you like to do that? I was like, "Oh, okay. That's a big shoe. It's a big challenge. Okay. Yeah, that's fine."

One respondent talked with pride about how his father and grandfather had been Church Wardens in his place of origin and now he too had been a Church Warden here in his parish in Ireland.

My grandfather was a Church Warden in Nigeria. My father was, and fortunately too, I was also privileged to serve as a pastor's Church Warden. So Anglicanism is something that runs in the blood. So when [the incumbent] and some other persons chose me to serve in this church council, I agreed.

One parish where both Church Wardens were international persons was negatively impacted by the current housing crisis. The incumbent explained that both these church wardens were devoted to the parish but had to leave the locality due to the lack of rental properties available locally. They had moved to a county within long-range commuting distance of Dublin and had to depart from their roles in the parish. While the housing crisis has impacted the entirety of the community, it is likely that its impact is particularly acute in the international community, especially among those who are more recent arrivals.

Ministry and leadership

Participants in two parish focus groups talked about how important it was for them to observe a parish reader, a lay reader or a member of the clergy who was, like them, of international origin.

I know there's this feeling about bias, affinity, and I look at [named Lay Reader], for example, I look at lay ministry. If we can have more people from, that's an avenue, that's a big platform for drawing people. We've seen people like [named Lay Reader], the first time we came I saw the name, I was like, oh, okay. But she wasn't in charge for a few Sundays, and we were really keen to see who is this person?

Yes. Lay ministry. I mean, it gives you, I use an example of where we work. I know when we came in here as doctors, we had to do the exams, the Irish exams to be integrated into the Irish healthcare system. We went to a lot of exams and trainings and other stuff before we get specially trained. If I'm seeing an African person in the clinic, I see that oh someone I know very well or somebody who is from, so that's also, he is aware of trying to encourage us and also trying to encourage people from African descent to get into the pastoral work here. But like I said, I don't know what the policy of the church in that.

They had another vicar from [African country], Reverend [name]. He came into my house and it was good to be with someone like myself. So it was a good thing.

The inclusion of cultural diversity in the ministerial leadership of a parish was very significant in one of focus groups in particular.

I know as a Church Warden I've had a few people talk to me about how do you get into lay ministry? Especially the lay reading-

Section D: What is working well for newcomers to the parish who have come from overseas?

Ongoing welcome by incumbent, ministry team and members of the congregation

Participants in the different focus groups all made reference to the importance of welcome, not only when people first arrive, but when it is consistent and particularly when it is sincere. Some noted the importance of the member of the congregation who chooses to befriend people, to persuade them to come to the tea or other event and to consistently build a relationship with them.

What I find, we have a wonderful person in this church called [named parishioner]. She stands at the door. How she remembers everybody's name I have no idea. But I think if we had more people who would do what she does, because even if you miss church, even once, the next time you come and she'll be like, "Oh, I have seen you for a while. How have you been, how are you?" She will come and she'll sit next to you. And she will literally quiz you. And in a way that makes you think like, "Oh, I am valued." They notice whether I'm there or not. And that in itself creates that kind of a relationship that makes you to keep coming. So if we had more people like her, I don't know how-

They also noted that it is important that shy or reticent people are given the space to engage and participate in their own time, and this requires sensitivity on the part of the people who do the welcoming.

There are many reasons why they are not getting interested yet, even though they wish to. Some because they are shy. Some because they are scared or I don't know. Some because they are like me, very forgetful of names and faces, scared of messing up people's names. So it's difficult.

Linked to this is the importance of regular hospitality where members of the congregation mix and engage, talk and listen, and do not just stick to their own familiar friendship groups, but engage with new people as well.

Then after the church services there'll be tea and coffees out, and that was another new for us to further introduce ourselves to other members of the congregation.

I think the tea and coffee as well after, that gives you the opportunity to talk to people and get to know them, because you see the faces but you never have a chat. And that is also very important. And all of the activities that are done after the church because that's what creates the community. Like we go to the picnic and we have groups so we can get to know each other.

Care, friendship and support – parish as a type of family network

As noted earlier, care, friendship and support by the incumbent but also be individual parishioners were seen as being very important to those taking part in the focus groups. This was particularly significant at times of crises or bereavement.

I stayed because of [incumbent], because he's actually very nice. And one of the things that actually impressed me was last year, I did lose my mom. And he came to my house. I wasn't expecting it, he came to visit and did all that. And I am someone that naturally, when I come to church, I'm in and out, I sit in my little corner. But for him to make that extra step, even though I just keep to my corner naturally, I was impressed by that. We did a funeral service at the church because I said to [the incumbent] that even though she attended Anglican Church in [her home country] that I would prefer to use this church for convenience sake and everything. And again, [the incumbent] was able to agree with that approach.

Participants talked about how individual incumbents had helped with school and other formal application processes.

In my case, I actually met [previous incumbent] outside of the church and he became very involved ... He would meet with me and he would talk to me and my child was about to start junior infants. And I actually hadn't looked for a place for her. And he just came in. He was like, "Isn't [child], about to be starting school?" And I said, "Oh yeah, yeah. I'm going to look for a place for her next..." And he just said to me, "You were supposed to have done that a long time ago." And so for me, it was the fact that he remembered her name. He remembered her age. He remembered and he actually literally brought the forms to me for her to start school. And he was so involved. So hands on. It meant to me 'so I care about you and everything to do with you'.

Some talked about how the incumbent kept in touch with individuals, checked in with them on a regular basis and was always willing to help.

You can call [the incumbent] and he helps. He is friendly and we are like his family and everybody needs that. We're all like one family.

One focus group described how the incumbent was welcomed regularly to their homes, to their joyful and sorrowful gatherings and how much they appreciated the way in which the incumbent had become part of their lives.

But from the first visit, [the incumbent] came to the house, always he ride his bicycle to my house. He was always there. So he knew the family so well.

As noted earlier, the sense of belonging was cited as the reason that two parishioners were continuing to commute to their original parish after moving across the city. The words 'family' or 'home' were used in most of the focus groups to describe the participants' sense of the importance of the parish to them.

I think it is that feeling that you are part of it, you are part of the family. You are welcomed.

I think the whole church. And everybody is very warm and well supporting. There's a moral support and they help, it's like an extended family to be honest. Yes like extended family.

So I don't know what I would have done without him and this church. It all feels like family.

One explained how the parish community represented a safe space where she could learn and ask more about Irish society to help her integration. It was an important place for them to learn social insights into Irish culture and to learn skills that are specifically useful in this, their country of destination. For some respondents, the parish was also an important place to further develop their language proficiency in English.

Well, I started in 2007 when [her two children] were enrolled to the school. And then I remember the first time when I walk into the church, I feel like home.... Yes. I think there's a structure there to allow you to blend into the community or society or the church with the friends here. And I think that's one of the ways, especially for someone who is away from home to another home. They do... Most of us I think, I can't really speak for others, but just for myself, I think we do feel like sometimes we need a bit of help to blend in because sometimes we do struggle because as you know everything's different when you move from one place to the other and then you will be... It takes time to learn even to understand language, sometimes even a simple joke. Sometimes it takes you a... For me, it took me a while to understand but I can ask people here and say, okay, I got that. So yeah.

Some commented on the fact that they were very far away from their relatives and how the parish was an additionally important social community for them and for their children.

So, one of the thing we missed we when moved is the kids were used to have a big community of support from the family, both of our families are Christians, so we know the kids had that outside from us. And then when we came, they lost that, the extended family, if you want. And I think we found some of that support in [named church] and that was important for us.

Parish-linked organisations such as the Mothers' Union were very important in extending that time of belonging beyond Sunday as well as enabling international persons from different parishes and denominations to meet and to enjoy themselves together.

There were [Mothers' Union] fashion shows, it was interesting to see other African nations with different dress materials. It was quite interesting, and there was one that had a huge dress that she wrapped around with big pants. So, it was really an interesting thing to see the other nature of African materials. So, I thought it was fun.

In some cases, involvement in those linked activities, like GFS, brought individuals more deeply into church itself.

I used to come in church and go, but what I stay long is because they asked me to join in with the activity, the GFS, the Sunday school, the church cleaning. So it gives you some responsibility

that you are in one in the community group, in their group that they need you also as a part of them instead of just sit and like that.

These linked organisations also have a significant role to play in welcome and inclusion.

The Boys Brigade, they love the kids, no matter your nationality. They were able the connect with them.

Faith values that embrace all

As noted already, almost all focus groups indicated that the lived Christian values of their parish community were of real significance to them. Those values are expressed in multiple ways: public communication such as the parish website, banners outside the church; in the preaching and prayers embedded in services, in the commitments and activities of the parish such as prayer groups, social action and outreach. As noted earlier, some of the focus group participants also talked about how the respect of the incumbent, ministerial team and congregation for cultural diversity was expressed through willingness to include different languages and traditions in the life of the parish (e.g. hymns in languages other than English, words of welcome and prayers from the different cultures and traditions in the parish).

Some of the focus groups also talked about how important it was to share hospitality with the community when they were the ones who brought food from their own culture. One focus group remembered a social event that had happened pre-Covid in their parish where the Nigerian women had made food for the whole parish and shared it with all the parishioners in the Church Hall. They were very positive about the willingness of all to embrace their culture of hospitality.

Yeah, so it's also the culture or the kind of environment that has been created here. [The incumbent] supported us. But that's all we needed. Them [the other parishioners] looking happy, enjoying the meal, and taking it away, and stuff like that was very good.

Respect

Participants in many of the focus groups used the words 'respect' and 'trust' for how they felt treated by both the incumbent and fellow parishioners. One focus group participant was very clear that the incumbent's respect for all regardless of background or culture was very important:

He respects everyone, it's a good learning culture.

Others talked about the respect from the whole community which manifested in willingness to accept people as participants and contributors. Being given roles and responsibilities in the parish denoted a sense of respect for them and valuing of them as members of the community.

So, we felt welcomed. And again, there was a sort of inclusiveness in the way things were done, people were asked to offer themselves, if you want to read in the church, if you are good at singing you could join the choir. So, we felt there's a sense of belonging.

They talked about how important it was to be listened to, that their opinions were valued and their suggestions acted upon.

[The incumbent is a] very nice and he has really helped us in the past. He's someone that you can just talk to. You can just sit down, talk about whatever problem you have. He's ever ready to assist you. He listens, yeah.

And [the incumbent is] someone that listens, he encourages.

Something I wanted to mention is the church in particular was very good at listening particular situations where some people from particular communities started coming because they invited someone. And the church looked after those people with particular activities.

Several focus groups described feeling that they had become part of a community where all are equal and no-one is looked down on because of skin colour, language or accent, culture or nationality of origin.

That's a huge thing. and just like everybody has said. He never makes you feel you're unwelcomed or from a different country.

They were pleased to be selected by the parish to represent them at diocesan events.

I was part of the group that attended when Archbishop came in. That was, is it in the High School. There was an initiative that you brought and people came from UK and it was more like discussion, inclusiveness, welcoming, and so on and so forth. It was a good idea because it brought people from various parishes and various areas. I remember [the incumbent] got me and about four of us, we went over and there was that discussion. We learned a lot. I want to say that that was very helpful and that was very beneficial, it gave us opportunity of talking to other parishes.

Some also noted the importance of patience on the part of parishes – being willing to wait until someone is ready to be involved, encouraging their inclusion and engagement.

To be honest, it was [the incumbent's] personality, her attitude to people. And in the work that she's doing in general. I saw the thing that I was missing in the different places I've been

before. And that gave me some hope that when maybe things will work better and it has been better. So that was the starting point of me staying and slowly, lowering my guard and getting back into being engaged in church activities. Yeah.

In one focus group in particular, the openness of the incumbent, his willingness to explain parish finances and other structures to everyone, was praised both for its transparency and for its respect for them as parishioners.

The second point is transparency. I'm actually impressed by that. Especially with the church finances and things like that. Because not every church is that transparent, and I think, what I like about [the incumbent], he runs it like a business. Even in the Select Vestry, so we talk about the accounts. And then he's also like, "There's a separation of responsibilities." So there's a level of trust. And I'll say, that's probably why the members are staying that long, because they trust who is actually leading the church. And they also trust those given responsibility because there's transparency, and there's accountability too.

The respondents appreciated their fellow parishioners who waited for them to accept invitations to partake in social or parish activities, who neither stopped asking when they did not immediately engage nor pressured them too much before they were ready. Eventually even shy people felt ready to take a greater part.

People made you welcome at tea and coffee. So, you always felt it's okay, people want me here. Yes. That was the same way that we experienced it.

And I think what new people in the church as well, I don't know how this can be encouraged, but for me I didn't know that many people. And I didn't really talk to that many people until I allowed myself to actually go to say to the coffee talk after church. You'd find that people are invited to come in, but with most people, it's just, they come in, they sit down after the hour, they walk away. But that opportunity is given the invitation is given. Yeah. It was after that I actually allowed myself to open up. So, it's like a two-way street. And I really don't know how people may be encouraged to actually be involved because at the end of the day, there is only so much invitations that can be issued. And I remember there was one time they used to have the friendship lunches as well. And I've attended maybe two or so, which were... Again, when [the incumbent] would say, "Ah, go on, you're not doing anything. Just come in, talk to a few people be involved." And I would end up coming in, and each and every single time I came in, I actually enjoyed it. You would meet people who actually don't come into church, like the elder parishioners. And they're great fun. But again, that was me making the effort to come in.

Section E: What might the parish do differently or better to welcome and include newcomers from overseas to the parish, in their opinions?

Many of the suggestions that emerged from the focus groups about how to improve welcome and inclusion are likely to mirror the concerns and suggestions that those who have worshipped in the parish (or in the Church of Ireland) all their lives would make. These included:

- The need to advertise the presence, location and welcome of the church to the locality especially where there were new housing developments. This could include going out to talk to people in new estates as well as having leaflets to hand out. It also included the need for better signage and other indicators of location.
- The need to engage post-Confirmation adolescents and young adults more effectively e.g. through their engagement in age-appropriate worship and music and the need to be more flexible about timing due to sporting commitments on Sunday mornings etc.
- The need to restore pre-Covid activities such as attendance at in-person services, Messy Church, parish breakfasts or friendship lunches, Summer Camp for children, meetings of the parish for social activities beyond Sunday morning.
- Set up a meeting & greeting committee where there are people assigned to welcoming, accompanying and saying farewell duty from week to week and who might accompany new people and encourage their engagement in groups or activities.
- Organise short bible study courses for interested members of the parish who wish to deepen their faith and their understanding.

The participants also had suggestions that were more focused on the needs of international newcomers to the parish, including:

- Establishment of a trained and vetted ministry team led by the incumbent and including members of the community who had come originally from overseas, to do

pastoral visiting of new arrivals, to 'check in' appropriately with newcomers who had not attended the parish for a while e.g. by WhatsApp or email.

- Encouragement of those members of the congregation who are international persons in origin to train for robed ministry roles such as Parish Reader and Lay Reader where they are interested and there is a discernible calling.
- Develop a parish policy to promote diversity and inclusion that allows for evaluation from time to time of how well the parish is doing in welcoming and including international persons (among other groups).
- Support documentation or sessions to explain the structures of the Church of Ireland, its parishes and dioceses to those who have arrived from abroad or from outside the Anglican church structures.
- Running of cultural events to celebrate the diverse cultures and nationalities in the parish to include dress, food and other activities. This could also be an opportunity for individual parishes to invite in their non-Anglican neighbours to 'come and see'.

Section F: What advice or good example can this parish give to the United Dioceses about welcoming and including newcomers from overseas?

The focus group participants offered a number of practical pieces of advice from their own contexts for the United Dioceses:

- The participants in the different focus groups noted how the quality of hospitality in their own parishes – the welcome given to people when they arrive and when they return, plus the existence of ‘a good tea’ - are very simple but important strategies for their parishes to share as good practice with the United Dioceses.
- Participants stressed how important the attitude and approach of the incumbent is for newcomers to the parish – a friendly, inclusive, respectful clergy person who engages with and reaches out to newcomers is very important and models inclusion to all in the parish.
- Friendly and inclusive parishioners are also very important – this includes those who have formal welcoming roles along with the ordinary person in the pew who reaches out to, and supports new arrivals.
- Welcoming people from the wider community into the church, the parish centre and the parish primary school for events or for more general use (e.g. rentals, mother & toddler groups etc.) gives the church and parish higher local visibility. It was noted by one of the groups that children’s activities in church, hall or school can involve parents with church in a positive and invitational way resulting in their eventually joining the parish.
- Churches having an online presence is positive for a number of reasons – first, it enables people to get a taste of that church’s worship and preaching before they decide to come to the church and second, it means that family overseas can join particular services such as baptisms, confirmations, funerals, services of remembrance.

- Participants in one focus group in particular were keen that there be more opportunities for sharing of activities and events (worship, planning and social) between parishes in the United Dioceses as we move beyond Covid restrictions.
- Participants in a number of focus groups were keen that multicultural events would not be limited to parishes but could be done across parishes or on a diocesan basis.

Summary of findings

The findings from the six parish focus groups highlighted a number of common issues:

1. International persons who have become actively engaged in the Church of Ireland are more likely to be from either Anglican or Anglican-adjacent faith backgrounds. Those we met were more likely to seek out a familiar place to worship in their own locality when they first moved to Ireland.
2. Many participants reported experiencing challenges in locating their local Church of Ireland church. There was a lack of signage in local areas and lack of information on google maps. There were exceptions where individual parishes had very up-to-date websites with a clear message about their personnel, their activities, their beliefs and values and their location.
3. There were several *pull factors* that strongly encouraged newcomer international people to continue to worship in a parish and become a part of the community. These are:
 - a. *Quality of Welcome & Hospitality*
 - i. A warm initial welcome by parishioners and by the ministry team / incumbent
 - ii. Continuing welcome and friendliness by parishioners in particular
 - iii. Hospitality after services and other social activities that give people opportunities to get to know others and to build relationships
 - b. *Ongoing care & support*
 - i. Caring, friendly, inclusive, respectful, supportive and active engagement with newcomers by the incumbent / ministry team
 - ii. Parishioners offering friendship and a sense of belonging to the community by taking an interest and including newcomers
 - iii. Participants in most focus groups talked about the parish in terms of their family in Ireland

- c. *Respect*
 - i. Including aspects of newcomers' cultures and languages in the life of the parish through greetings, worship and hymns
 - ii. Incumbent, ministry team and key parishioners actively modelling respect for diversity and for newcomers in word and action
 - d. *Sharing of responsibility and leadership*
 - i. Participants reported how positive they felt about being nominated by the incumbent for a role of responsibility or being elected by fellow parishioners
 - ii. Many of the participants volunteered for roles and indicated a willingness to support the parish in a variety of ways through the use of their gifts and / or availability
 - iii. Participants indicated that the parish community provided a very important place for them to learn or practise a range of social, cultural, linguistic and professional skills which help them integrate further in Ireland
 - e. *Faith and discipleship in the parish*
 - i. Every focus group talked about the importance of the quality of preaching and prayer
 - ii. It was important to the participants that the message about the Christian faith and values of the parish was clearly expressed and lived out in practice
 - iii. Participants welcomed opportunities provided by the parish to deepen and inform further their faith and some wished for more such opportunities
4. Participants made a number of concrete suggestions for improvement in the inclusion of cultural diversity at both parish level and diocesan level:
- a. Some of these recommendations reflected concerns that would be common for all parishioners, such as rolling back Covid-related restrictions, increasing social interaction and addressing the lack of appropriate opportunities for youth engagement
 - b. Other recommendations were specific to their experience as newcomers to the Church of Ireland
 - i. Deeper engagement by international parish members in a range of ministries such as pastoral care and leading worship. These are ministries that require discernment and training and would need support at diocesan level
 - ii. Provision of information and guidance about the structure and operation of parish, of diocese and the Church of Ireland

- iii. Multicultural events at parish level both for the parishioners and as opportunities to invite neighbouring communities to participate
- iv. Multi-cultural aspects embedded in diocesan events through hospitality, worship, language and music
- v. Representation of their parish by international people at social, planning or worship events organised by the United Dioceses

Chapter 4 – Visits to Parish Outreach Initiatives

During August 2022, we carried out visits to two different parishes which are offering ongoing outreach and support to people living either in a local Direct Provision Centre or in a local hotel providing accommodation for Ukrainian people fleeing the war. In each case, the Church of Ireland clergy and parishes are working to support people regardless of their beliefs. They are doing so because of their own express commitment as Christians to the scriptural call to welcome the stranger, to care for the poor and the marginalised. In the interests of absolute confidentiality of the people being supported, the parishes are not being identified.

Parish Visit 1

This outer suburban parish is in an area of rapid housing growth. There are a number of hotels in the area, some of which have been used in the last number of months for housing those people who have fled to Ireland due to the war in Ukraine. Parishes of different Christian denominations in that locality are working together to provide a range of supports for the Ukrainian displaced persons. One of the supports provided was a week-long intensive Summer Camp that ran in the extensive Parish Centre, its grounds, its kitchens, its bigger and smaller meeting rooms and in the church itself.

It was organised by the Ukrainians themselves and staffed by volunteers from the parish and other neighbouring Church of Ireland communities. Most of those who attended were women including mothers, grandmothers, and their children. There were also some men present. Many of the participants had left husbands, fathers, brothers and sons behind in Ukraine, on the front line. The summer camp included art classes, drama workshops, knitting circles, meetings, cooking, outdoor play for the children. There were chances for people who have had to adapt to being institutionally fed to be able to cook and compare recipes for borscht. It was an intensely busy week for all who were involved. This included the need to support people who were significantly traumatised by their experiences at home when war broke out. One of the children drew the picture overleaf, which gives a clear idea of what can be on the mind of a child who has fled war, and left loved ones behind.



The vast majority of the Ukrainians who took part are not members of an Anglican church or other reformed Christian churches. Regardless of their religious affiliations, the participants were invited, if they wished, to attend the Sunday service at the end of the Summer Camp. Some of them returned for this service. Part of the service was in Ukrainian, and those who participated wrote and read prayers, one of which is copied below. It gives a very clear sense of the priorities for people whose country has been invaded and whose relatives are separated from them by war.

We are thankful to You, O God, that you saved our lives and brought us to a safe land.

We ask You to protect the lives of our soldiers - our husbands, fathers, and sons - so that they may come back home alive and well.

Save the lives of all our loved ones, and of all Ukrainians who remain in our land and in our occupied territories.

Please grant healing to all who have been wounded, and give comfort to the families of those who have been killed.

Give wisdom to President Zelensky and all in our government, that they make wise decisions so as to bring peace to our land as soon as possible.

We ask You to stop the source of this evil which has brought war to our country.

We pray too for those in other war zones, that love may prevail in their hearts, and that You will bring peace on earth.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Summer Camp gave this parish the opportunity to walk alongside people who have fled war, whose lives have been turned upside down, who have been stripped of possessions and a sense of hope and security and who are separated from loved ones. The parish continues, along with other denominations in the locality, to offer practical support to the Ukrainians who are locally based.

Parish Visit 2

This parish is in a rural area where a Direct Provision Centre in the countryside opened in the last five years. The local Church of Ireland parish made a decision to offer support and friendship to the people who came to live in the DP Centre regardless of whether they were Anglican, Christian, of any other world faith or none. Currently the DP Centre houses people from Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine, all of who have fled from conflict, as well people from various other African and Asian countries. We visited the DP Centre on its Open Day in August when past residents returned to meet their friends and many people from the parish and from other local groups joined with the residents to enjoy sunshine, food and activity.

The local parish offered practical supports to the residents of the following types. First, the incumbent and his wife made themselves available for pastoral support of people in the DP Centre, some of whom were carrying significant trauma due to their experiences prior to arriving there. They were available to be called out to offer help, night or day, and it was clear from their interactions with many residents that they were both trusted and respected. What was also clear was their respect and care for the various residents we met over the course of the visit.

Second, the parish shop provided a space where residents in the DP Centre could gain Irish work experience and a reference. This opportunity also created relationships and friendships between volunteers from the parish and residents of the DP Centre. While at the Open Day, I was in the company of one of the parish volunteers and a mother and daughter, both originally from Iraq, past residents of the DP Centre who had now moved on to their own home a distance away from the Centre. There was an obvious friendship between the parish volunteer and the two Iraqi women, forged through their work side-by-side in the parish shop.

Third, the residents were all made welcome to come to church on Sundays if they wished. Several of the residents who came from Anglican or Anglican-adjacent churches in their countries of origin became actively involved in church, singing in the choir for example. Some of the residents whom I met spoke enthusiastically about their participation in church, noting that their children enjoyed Sunday worship and that they themselves liked being part of the choir.

Concluding summary

The visits described are to two sample parishes who have responded to local need of displaced international persons who are currently being housed by the State in a local hotel or in a local Direct Provision Centre. In each case, the incumbent and parishioners were motivated to offer supports to those who find themselves in a most marginalised position, in a strange country, far away from their families and loved ones, their lives, their livelihoods and their home and possessions. Both parishes opened the church doors to those who they supported and invited them to join them in worship if they wished. Both clergy described their motivation as a parish-wide response to the scriptural call to care for and welcome the stranger.

Chapter 5 – Learning from the Book of Ruth

There is a wealth of published material exploring the *Book of Ruth* as a scriptural and theological lens through which to examine the current experience of global migration. Justin & Nittali (2022) use the *Book of Ruth* to analyse current experiences of migrants in today's world. Much of what is written focuses on the impact of migration on the relationships and attitudes in parishes which become places of cross-cultural meeting. Glaser & Weir (2008) argue that, despite the very traditional understandings of the world, gender relationships and so on, the *Book of Ruth* has much to offer to parishes today because of its exploration of compassionate loyalty, 'hesed', in a cross-cultural context. Magezi (2019) uses the *Book of Ruth* both to explore migration in redemptive history and to challenge today's church and parish to develop effective ministry to migrants. Melgar (2015) argues that the *Book of Ruth* focuses very constructively on the benefits to a community of welcoming migrants.

The *Book of Ruth* presents a very accessible story, filled with dialogue and central characters who are both likeable and believable. Much of the published material analyses those characters and their inter-relationships in order to explore concepts and to encourage positive attitudes and relationships. For example, Chan (2014) uses the character of Boaz in the *Book of Ruth* as a focus to provide insight into our Christian understanding of hospitality. Guyette (2013) looks at three of the central characters in the *Book of Ruth* - Naomi, Ruth and Boaz - to explore human virtues and social practices that can build peaceful, generous and compassionate communities. Southwood (2014) explores the interdependence of Naomi and Ruth as each migrates and is assimilated into another culture (while each also retains their ethnicity of origin). The story and the characters in the *Book of Ruth* give a narrative expression to an idea that is of central significance in ancient Hebrew texts, namely the care of, and welcome for the stranger or newcomer, and provision of hospitality to them (Cedar 2020).

Four key characters in the *Book of Ruth*

In order to understand the findings of this study through that faith lens of the call to us to care for, and give hospitality to the newcomer, I am using the scriptural lens of the *Book of Ruth*, with a specific focus on four characters in order to explore the experiences described

by the focus group participants in six parishes in Chapter 3 and our observations of the support activities in two other parishes outlined in Chapter 4.

Naomi, with her husband Elimelech and their two sons Mahlon and Charon, left their home in the land of Judah and migrated to neighbouring Moab to escape from a famine. They settled in Moab. The two sons married Moabite women. But before any grandchildren were born, both Naomi's sons died and then, her husband died. Naomi was now alone in a foreign country, with only her widowed and childless daughters-in-law for company. In a deeply patriarchal society, she was now marginalised and without necessary male protection. She was also left without hope for the future in the form of grandchildren. She decided to return (to re-migrate) to her own country of Judah. She urged both daughters-in-law to return to their own people, but ultimately Ruth opted to come with her and migrate to Judah.

Ruth is the central character of the Book bearing her name. Ruth accompanied Naomi back to her home in Judah insisting that Naomi's people would become her people, that Naomi's home would become her home, and that Naomi's God would become her God. It is important to know that Moab and Moabites were poorly regarded by the Jewish people because they worshipped other gods, they engaged in human sacrifice and they frequently fought with their neighbours, the people of Judah. Ruth found herself, a young, impoverished and childless widow, in a strange country with her mother-in-law, who was an older, impoverished widow. Ruth was out gleaning for corn at the time of the harvest, a risky enough activity for a young, impoverished and unprotected migrant woman. The two women set about ensuring that they would improve their situation by eliciting the help of a male relative of Naomi's deceased husband. They viewed Boaz as their potential 'kinsman redeemer'.

Boaz was a wealthy farmer and was a kinsman of Naomi. He noticed Ruth gleaning corn in his fields and was told of her loyalty to her mother-in-law and her hard work. This impressed him. He ensured plenty of grain was left for her to glean. He was kind and considerate to her and indicated that he was willing to be their kinsman redeemer, even though another person was a closer relative to Naomi. Ultimately, Boaz married Ruth. Through her marriage to Boaz, Ruth became a part of Jewish society and the mother of a very important Jewish dynasty.

Oprah was the second daughter-in-law of Naomi. She too was left young, widowed, childless and poor. Initially she also planned to migrate with Naomi and Ruth from her home in Moab to Judah. Ultimately however, Oprah decided to return to her own family in Moab and to remain part of her own tribe and place and belief system. Naomi actively encouraged both her daughters-in-law to return to their homes so that they might have a second chance at marriage, motherhood and security. We are told that when Oprah decided to do this, Naomi and she embraced, so there was no evidence of any rancour in their parting, or any negative judgement about Oprah on the part of Naomi.

Learnings from a study of the *Book of Ruth*

What do we learn from the study of these four characters and how can it be applied to the findings from this research project? First, let us consider what we learn from the *Book of Ruth*. Migrants can be driven from their home country by need. Those who migrate lack the extended family and kinship support structures still available to those who remain in their own country. Those who migrate move to a new society where cultures, beliefs and practices may differ significantly from those with which they are familiar. They may be marginalised and impoverished, especially if they are no longer able to work or there is no-one to support them. They do not have the kinship or institutional supports that are available to those living in their own home place. Therefore, they have to work very hard to survive and to gain acceptance. This necessitates friendship and structural support from key people in the indigenous group, people who not only act as guides to the culture and friends, but also people who offer the equivalent support of the 'kinsman redeemer' by giving status and a position of respect to the newcomer.

Application of learning from the *Book of Ruth* to this study

Our focus groups enabled us to talk to many people who were in Ruth's shoes – they had migrated for a range of reasons from their own countries and had settled in Ireland. Many of them described church as a place that could help them to be less marginalised. This was partly because, in their church community, they met members of the congregation who were like Naomi. These were parishioners who were open, friendly and supportive to them, who helped them to navigate their new culture and place, who made it clear that they were welcome and wanted.

They also met individuals who, like Boaz, had the institutional and structural position and authority to improve their standing. In the context of church, this happened both when the incumbent supported an international person in the parish with official forms and applications, or by advocating with officialdom on their behalf. It also happened when the incumbent gave a role of responsibility and authority to the newcomer. And it happened when the incumbent ensured that aspects of new language, culture or worship practices were embraced in the life of the parish.

One of the most interesting aspects of the focus groups was finding that, as the characters who came to the church as Ruth matured in their membership of the community and settled in, some of them in their turn became Naomi characters who welcomed and supported other newcomers.

Each of parishes from which we drew the focus groups had been deliberate in creating and sustaining a culture of hospitality in line with the scriptural call to us as disciples to welcome the stranger or the newcomer. This welcome was embraced and enacted by the incumbent who was in a structural position of authority – a Boaz character. It was also embraced and enacted by parishioners who were essential to the ongoing success of a culture of hospitality – these were the Naomi characters. It was embraced too by the newcomers who responded positively, took the opportunities offered to contribute, embraced the welcome given to them and in their turn gave hospitality to others who came to the parish after them – the Ruth characters.

One of the things we learn from the *Book of Ruth* is that the active engagement by all of the characters is essential to the positive outcome of the story. The agency, decisions and actions of Ruth, Naomi and Boaz are all necessary to the story's unfolding. The real twist at the very end of the *Book of Ruth* is the revealing of God's redemptive plan through this story of migration, acceptance and new life. Ruth married Boaz and they had a son, Obed. This child became the father of Jesse who was, in his turn, the father of David. And of course, we know that Jesus was of the house of David.

A key message from the *Book of Ruth* is not just that we as believers are called to practice genuine hospitality, to welcome and care for the stranger or the newcomer. We are also called to believe that God's plans for us include the unexpected. We learn that God may have a key role for the newcomer in our church, our parish, our community, our society as part of his ongoing plan of redemption and salvation. We are called to believe that migration brings blessings just as it did in the *Book of Ruth* and we are called to embrace those blessings and opportunities.

What of Oprah? Oprah decided to remain with her own people. Although some commentators dismiss Oprah as less loyal than Ruth, the *Book of Ruth* itself does not portray her negatively. She returned home at the urgings of Naomi, and remained with her own people and in her own culture. As outlined in Chapter 4, we also visited two sample parishes where care and support were being offered to the stranger or the newcomer in their midst but in these cases, primarily to people who were outside of the parish community. These parishes chose to support and care for displaced newcomers who, like Oprah, may decide in time to return to their own country when the war is over and it is safe. Others will stay in Ireland but choose to remain with their own beliefs, their own cultures, their own communities. They too are deserving of care and hospitality.

Nowhere in scripture is there a qualification that the call to extend hospitality to the stranger or the newcomer only applies to those we like or agree with, or who are like us. It is a universal call to us to care, to be hospitable and to treat our neighbour as ourselves, even if our neighbour is very different to us.

Concluding summary

Scriptural study of the *Book of Ruth* has been used frequently in parish and other church settings as a way of developing a deeper understanding of the nature and impact of migration, both on the migrants themselves and on those with the duty of hospitality to welcome the stranger or the newcomer. It is helpful to re-examine the findings of this study through the lens of the *Book of Ruth* for the following three reasons.

First, it shows the interconnected nature of all the characters in the story because it is centred on relationships. No character on their own could have brought the story to its positive conclusion – all characters acted and all characters were necessary. This is a very important reminder that the Naomis of this world, namely the laity in the congregation, are every bit as important to the positive playing out of a culture of welcome as are the Boazes of the world, namely the incumbents. And of equal importance are the newcomers themselves who embrace the welcome in their own way and in their own time, to become active and contributing members of the community – the Ruths of this story.

Second, it reminds us that God works his redemptive plans in unexpected ways and through unexpected people. It is a clear call to us to discern the spiritual gifts that newcomers bring to our parishes and to be open to embracing these. Those parishes who actively welcome, include and encourage their newcomer international members not only gain in terms of the added gifts those people bring to their local community. They also experience a subtle change in their own culture through leaving themselves open to the spiritual gifts of newcomers.

Third, by focusing also on Oprah, we are called to recognise that God values all people, those who become part of our communities and parishes as well as those who remain in their own communities. They too are the stranger or newcomer also deserving of our care and hospitality because that scriptural imperative is not a qualified one. We are called to be hospitable to all, regardless of identity, culture, origin and belief.

Chapter 6 – Conclusions and Recommendations

This study centred primarily on the voices of those who were newcomers to a sample of six Church of Ireland parishes in Dublin & Glendalough, each of which had a reported minimum of 25% of its parish being made up of international persons in the Lodge (2020) study. It explored their experiences of coming to the parish, what factors influenced them to remain in the parish and how they became more actively involved in the parish. It also asked them what recommendations they would make for any improvements in practices to welcome and include newcomers, particularly international persons, in their parish and what the United Dioceses could learn from their parish's practice. The study also visited two outreach and support projects in operation in two other parishes to support newcomers to Ireland who were in the most marginalised groups, being displaced persons and refugees. Many of these newcomers were not members of the Anglican or any reformed Christian church, and many were members of other world faiths.

The outcomes of the focus group study are very similar to studies of newcomer / migrant experiences in parishes in Ireland and elsewhere. The parish can provide a very important link with home and the familiar for many newcomers through its patterns of worship, hymn-singing and linked activities. It can also be a place of social as well as spiritual support, through the friendships it offers, through the structural support given and through the assistance given to newcomers to navigate the culture and society in which they now live. It is very important for international persons to move from being the recipients of care to being treated as equals in the distribution of roles and responsibilities in the parish, and in their turn to become care-givers and providers of service to others, and to be accepted as such.

Respect is both modelled and created through structure by the actions and planning of the incumbent / ministry team. However, without the active support and engagement by parishioners, real inclusion is impossible. Parishes that are willing to change and be changed by the presence of newcomers and international persons are enriched by the spiritual and other gifts of their new members. What the focus group findings from this study, alongside other Irish and international research shows us includes the following key point. First, initial

welcome, no matter how warm, is not sufficient to sustain long-term membership of parishes. Second, welcome must be sustained, and it needs to be accompanied by active, respectful inclusion. Third, this places high expectations on the person of the incumbent both to offer support and care that may be above-and-beyond what is given to indigenous lay members of the parish and to consistently model inclusive, respectful engagement to all parishioners. Fourth, all members of the congregation are called to be active in welcome and inclusion and to be open to the familiar culture of their parish potentially changing and developing through growth in new membership. Fifth, this requires structural support, both at parish level and beyond. There is a role for local parish structures but also for support from both the United Dioceses and central Church bodies.

The findings were explored through scriptural lens of the *Book of Ruth* which highlighted the key roles that each of the protagonists played in the action and outcome of that story and most importantly, highlighted the redemptive plans of God working through the events that unfolded. The study of the *Book of Ruth* is an important reminder that our faith should guide us to trust in the changes God brings our way as parish community, as Diocese and as Church.

The study of the *Book of Ruth* also reminds us that some migrants will chose to assimilate to a greater degree into their place of arrival while others will chose to remain with their own people or culture. God's call to us as disciples to welcome and be hospitable to the stranger or newcomer does not differentiate between the Ruths and the Oprahs of this world. Scripture calls us to extend welcome and care to all those who come to our shores, not to pick and choose only the migrants with whom we may feel more comfortable. The two sample parishes we visited where activity is taking place to support migrants who are not 'of the parish' in the traditional sense is an important and timely reminder of the practical ways in which we can put that call to undifferentiated hospitality into practice and how this needs to respond to the changes of need and circumstance in our world from one day to the next.

Final recommendations:

- Share the good practice in place in the parishes visited by hearing the voices of incumbents, members of the congregation who are indigenous and members of the congregation who are international persons
- Share good practice in place in a range of parishes supporting marginalised newcomers to Ireland in ways that do not undermine necessary confidentiality to support people who may be vulnerable and who are in a position of structural powerlessness
- Create a bible study based on the *Book of Ruth* for use in parishes with input from volunteer incumbents, indigenous and international persons from these congregations
- Seek ways to encourage congregants who are international in origin to consider training for various structural ministries such as pastoral parish-based ministry in support of the incumbent, as well as robed ministries leading services such as Parish Reader and Lay Reader
- Encourage parishes, rural deaneries and the United Dioceses to celebrate cultural diversity in social, educational and worship spaces
- Create an online resource using plain and accessible language that explains the structures of the Church of Ireland, the United Dioceses and the parishes as well as the approach to worship to those who are newcomers to our congregations

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