

UNITED DIOCESES OF DUBLIN AND GLENDALOUGH

Making Diocesan Synod Better for Everyone

**Report of the Diocesan Synods Review Group to the
Diocesan Councils of Dublin and Glendalough**

June 2026

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1. Introduction

Why review Diocesan Synod?

At the Diocesan Synod in October 2025, Archbishop Michael Jackson challenged members of the Diocesan Synod to find ways to make Synod¹ more effective. His remarks echoed concerns that members of the Diocesan Council had expressed about falling attendances at Synod in recent years. The Diocesan Synod Review Group was set up by the Diocesan Council in December 2025. The Review Group was asked to review the organisation and business of Synod and to suggest ways in which the running of Synod could be improved. This is the Report of the Diocesan Synod Review Group.

Overall, what did the Diocesan Synod Review Group conclude?

The Review Group found that Synod fulfils many of the purposes that it is expected to fulfil, and we believe that Synod has many strengths. *The* unique strength of the Diocesan Synod is that, annually, it brings together, lay representatives from *every* parish in the Dioceses with the clergy and Archbishop to pray, worship, think about, discuss and make decisions about how the work – or *Mission* – of the Church can be advanced. The strong commitment of Synod members to engaging in the work of Synod is very evident. The members of the Review Group believe that if we did not have the structure of the Diocesan Synod in place, we would be seeking to invent it.

The over-arching, positive message from the Review is that Synod members value the Diocesan Synod and want it to evolve to better meet their needs. All bodies must evolve to meet changing needs, and the Diocesan Synod is no different. Taken as a whole, the Review suggests that Synod members are struggling with a meeting format that is not well-suited to their needs and the needs of the Church.

The current format of Synod has been heavily influenced by the ways things have been done in the past, but it has the potential to be adapted to the current needs of its members and the Dioceses. At Synod meetings, members fulfil important administrative, reporting and other requirements effectively. However, the Review Group believes that the current format of Synod has not evolved sufficiently to facilitate the sort of listening, discernment and informed decision-making that will inspire and support Synod members to further the Mission of the Church in the Dioceses, now and in the future.

Finding a way forward

There is considerable flexibility in how Synods may be organised. The Review Group believes that the Dioceses need to use that flexibility to evolve how Synod meetings are organised and run. Our

¹ In these dioceses, the Diocesan Synods – the Synod of Dublin and the Synod of Glendalough – meet jointly for virtually all business. For the sake of simplicity, this report refers to the “Diocesan Synods” and “Diocesan Councils” using the singular form of these nouns – the Diocesan Synod, the Diocesan Council – as these are the commonly used terms.

Introduction

recommendations seek to build on the existing strengths of Synod meetings and strengthen the capacity of Synod members to engage in Synod in meaningful ways.

We hope that these recommendations will be useful to Archbishop Jackson, the Diocesan Council and the members of Diocesan Synod as they work together to make Synod more effective and advance the work of the Church in the United Dioceses.

2. How did the Review Group work?

We thought about what Synod is meant to do

The Diocesan Synod Review Group began its work by examining *what* meetings of Diocesan Synod are intended to achieve (its purposes or functions) and *how* the work of the Diocesan Synod is to be conducted. We believed that would give us a good way to assess how effectively Synod is working at present. We also thought this would help us to shape practical recommendations for the future.

We collected a lot of information about the Diocesan Synod

Our work was shaped by a wide range of information and the experiences of many people.

- We examined the requirements for diocesan synods set out in the *Constitution of the Church of Ireland* and the *Standing Orders* (rules) that have been agreed by the Diocesan Synod of Dublin and Glendalough.
- Two sources about the nature of synods were especially helpful to us. The Spring 2024 edition of *Search: A Church of Ireland Journal* carried very informative articles on the theme of synodality in Church life. Dean Stephen Farrell of Ossory, who had authored one of the articles, provided very constructive comments to us on an early draft of Chapter 3 of this Report where we examine the functions of the Diocesan Synod.
- We heard from Synods in other dioceses about how they organise their meetings. We wrote to the Diocesan Secretaries in each of the other four dioceses in the Southern Province of the Church of Ireland², and they shared invaluable insights and documents with us.
- We wanted to learn about previous meetings of the Diocesan Synod. We consulted articles about Synod meetings published in the *Church Review* magazine or on the Diocesan website. We read the addresses that Archbishop Jackson has given at Synods in recent years. We examined the *Books of Reports*, agendas and other papers that have been issued to members in advance of recent Synod meetings.
- We asked the Diocesan Office for attendance figures at Synod in previous years. The Diocesan Secretary was able to give us figures about the membership and attendances of Synod in 2023, 2024 and 2025. Unfortunately, figures for earlier years were not available.
- We collected views from Synod members through a semi-formal SurveyMonkey survey, especially about their experiences of Synod 2025. The survey collected quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (commentary) data. A large majority (72%) Synod members who attended Synod 2025 responded to the survey and that gave us reliable information about

² The five dioceses in the Southern Province of the Church of Ireland are: Dublin & Glendalough; Cashel, Ferns & Ossory; Cork, Cloyne & Ross; Meath & Kildare; and Tuam, Limerick & Killaloe.

How did the Review Group work?

their views. This information was very valuable in the Review. Unfortunately, only 39% of the Synod members who did not attend Synod 2025 responded to the survey. This means that we can't be sure that the views they shared with us are representative of the other members who did not attend.

- We invited members who completed the survey to let us know if they wished to be contacted about their comments, or if they wished to send further information to us. We followed up with all who asked to be contacted, and four additional sets of comments were received as a result.
- We benefited from the wisdom of several people who have had direct experience in organising Synod and other church-related meetings. You will see their names in the Acknowledgements section of this report. Interviews with these people helped us to understand the role that they play (or played) in organising Synod or the lessons that they have gained in organising other church-related meetings. All of them provided valuable suggestions on how Synod meetings could be made better.
- Some members of the Review Group had experience in organising large-scale meetings in other bodies and their insights provided valuable information to us.

We used the information to draw findings and make recommendations

The Review Group met five times between January and June 2026 to oversee the Review and we worked collaboratively on the task given to us. We agreed on the information to be collected, and the data received was shared with Review Group members. Initial drafts of chapters were drafted by one member of the Group using the available data, two further members of the Group reviewed the drafts and the underlying data, and the amended chapters were reviewed by the whole Group. Advice on the analysis of statistical data was generously provided by two members of Synod who were not members of the Review Group.

Emerging findings and recommendations were reported to Diocesan Council in March 2026, and the comments of Council members were considered by the Review Group. When we had prepared an initial full draft of the report, we shared it with some of the key officers of Synod and Archbishop Jackson, and we invited their comments. You will see the names of all those who assisted in the Acknowledgements section of this report. The report was amended in the light of their comments, and we are grateful to them for their input. We hope that by involving those who will have responsibilities in implementing improvements, our recommendations are practical and focussed. Of course, the Review Group remains responsible for the contents of this Report.

A self-review now: an external review in the future

All of the members of the Review Group are current members of the Diocesan Synod and most of the information we used came from Synod members. So, the Review that we conducted could be called a "self-review" – a review of Diocesan Synod conducted by Synod members ourselves. This sort of internal review or self-review can be a very effective way to help any organisation to reflect on its own

How did the Review Group work?

strengths and weaknesses, and implement improvements. We hope that will be the outcome of this Review.

But there is, of course, value in having an external perspective too. At a further stage, perhaps when some of the recommendations in this report have been implemented for a period, the Diocesan Council could consider commissioning external research about Synod. This research could allow others to examine how well we work together in Synod to advance the Mission of the Church in the United Dioceses.

3. A working definition of the purposes of Diocesan Synod and how it is intended to operate

Summary

In this chapter we explain how the Review Group developed a working definition of the purposes of the Diocesan Synod and how it is supposed to operate. This working definition helped to inform our thinking as we reviewed the organisation and business of Synod.

What is the Diocesan Synod supposed to do?

Synods are formal representative assemblies in Christian churches convened to discuss, advise, or decide on matters of doctrine, administration and policy. They have existed since the earliest period of the Church's history. Since the Disestablishment of the Established Church in the nineteenth century, the Church of Ireland has held synods at all-Ireland and diocesan levels: the General Synod and Diocesan Synods. The members of these synods comprise elected clergy and laity, together with bishops.

We can learn about what the Diocesan Synod is intended to do in at least two ways. We can study the fundamental rules that govern Synod (the *Constitution of the Church of Ireland* and the Standing Orders of the Diocesan Synod), and we can examine the lived experiences of Synods.

The rules that govern Diocesan Synod

The membership, working arrangements and functions of both the Diocesan and General Synods are grounded in the *Constitution of the Church of Ireland*. Chapter II of the *Constitution*, particularly Part I, provides the basis for the establishment, membership, responsibilities and rules for the organisation of Diocesan Synods. Each diocese is enabled to set its own Standing Orders (rules) to guide how the business of its Diocesan Synod is to be transacted. In the case of the United Dioceses of Dublin and Glendalough, the Standing Orders are largely concerned with how members are to be elected, how representatives of the Dioceses to other bodies are to be elected or appointed, and how the business of Synod meetings is to be ordered and arranged. Tasks assigned to the Diocesan Synod are dispersed throughout the Constitution and both the Constitution and Standing Orders prescribe certain items to be included on the agenda of Synod. However, neither the *Constitution* or the Standing Orders provide a single, comprehensive statement of the core functions or purposes of the meetings of Diocesan Synods.

The lived experiences of Diocesan Synods

What has happened at Synods in the past can enrich our understanding of what Synod meetings are intended to do. Meetings of Diocesan Synod must include the items prescribed by either the *Constitution* or Standing Orders but the Synod may "suspend Standing Orders" to allow for the discussion of items or issues that fall outside the prescribed items. This facility provides considerable flexibility to diversify the range of issues that may be discussed and the formats in which discussions may be held. For example, presentations from individuals who are not members of Synod, or small group discussions may be facilitated in this way.

The information collected by the Review Group shows that in previous years, meetings of Diocesan Synods have been used to consider a wide range of issues relevant to the Church in the Dioceses. The comments from Synod members who responded to our survey and the interviews that we conducted suggest that there is a strong expectation that the meetings of Synod should advance and facilitate the broad Mission of the Church in practical ways.

Box 1 summarises the range of functions that we can identify from the rules that govern Synod and the experiences of Synods in recent years. It is clear that meetings of Synods must seek to fulfil a wide range of functions.

Box 1: Key purposes of the meetings of Diocesan Synods

Overall governance/shared decision-making

- Synod members reflect the views and needs of the people of God throughout the dioceses, and the Synod provides a way in which they can make decisions on behalf of the Church in the dioceses.
- The Diocesan Synod has relationships with other governance bodies such as the General Synod, the Representative Church Body and the General Synod Board of Education (to which it elects members).
- The Diocesan Synod elects members to various Diocesan bodies such as the Episcopal Electoral College, the Diocesan Board of Education, the Diocesan Committee of the Church's Ministry of Healing and the Diocesan Committee of Patronage.
- The Diocesan Synod elects members to serve on the Diocesan Council and officers of the Synod such as the Honorary Clerical and Lay Secretaries and Treasurers.
- The Diocesan Synod makes regulations, for example, on how its business is to be conducted and church records are to be kept.
- The Diocesan Synod establishes certain disciplinary and appeal mechanisms, such as the Diocesan Courts.

Management and accountability

The Diocesan Synod helps to ensure the effective management of Diocesan bodies and accountability for the management of the Church's financial and other resources:

- The Diocesan Synod receives and discusses annual reports from Diocesan bodies about the work that they undertake (for example, reports from the Diocesan Council, the Diocesan Board of Education, the Diocesan Youth Council, etc.). It also receives and monitors reports from officers who are appointed to undertake roles for the Church.
- The Diocesan Synod appoints auditors, and it receives and must approve financial and other statements concerning the work, income, expenditure and financial assets of the Dioceses. This reporting fulfils part of the requirements of Charities legislation, including adherence to the Charities Regulator's Governance Code.³
- The Diocesan Synod has responsibilities for, or must be consulted about, aspects of the management and ownership of Church property within the Dioceses.
- The Diocesan Synod, subject to the approval of the RCB, may form parishes into groups or unions, divide groups and unions, and dissolve parishes. */continued next page*

³ The six principles of the Charities Governance Code are:
(1) Advancing Charitable Purpose,
(2) Behaving with Integrity
(3) Leading People

(4) Exercising Control
(5) Working Effectively
(6) Being Accountable & Transparent.
Charities Regulator (2018) *Charities Governance Code*, pp.13-27
available at [Charities Governance Code](#)

Advancing the mission of the Church

Synod meetings can advance and facilitate the broad mission of the Church in the Dioceses. For example:

- Presidential addresses to the Diocesan Synod have discussed the importance of the “Five Marks of Mission”⁴ promulgated by the Anglican Communion and have advocated for their adoption in the work of the Synod and in the life of the Dioceses.
- Recent Synods have facilitated strategic planning about a Mission Plan for the dioceses.
- Debates and presentations have highlighted or given rise to discussions about how specific aspects of the mission of the Church are advanced. Recent examples have included presentations on Pioneer Ministry, Youth Ministry, and the ministry to those who are ill through the Ministry of Healing.
- The role of the Church in the provision of education in schools and in educational policy making has been a regular feature of Synod business.
- Although occurring less frequently on the agendas of Synod, challenging social and other issues have featured in comments and debates, including homelessness, work by missionary societies and charities to advance healthcare and education in developing countries, clergy wellbeing and the blessing of same sex relationships.

Inspiring the people of God through communication and the sharing of information

- The Diocesan Synod provides a way to inform Synods members and the wider Church community about the work of the Church.
- The *Constitution* provides that certain reports and information about the work of Diocesan and other bodies must be shared among Synod members.

- The *Book of Reports* provides considerable detail about the work of Diocesan bodies. Synod members learn more about this work through the presentations, debates and discussions, and various Church organisations mount information stands at Synod.
- Information about the work of the Church in the Dioceses that is shared at Diocesan Synod gains wider circulation among the wider Church through the articles about the meetings of Diocesan Synod that are published in the *Church Review* magazine and on the Diocesan website.

Social interaction and solidarity

Meetings of Synod facilitate the coming together of Church members from across all parts of the Dioceses. Through this interaction, Synod members get to know each other better and support each other in living out their lives of faith and faith-inspired action:

- Meetings of Diocesan Synod facilitate the making and strengthening of connections between Synod members. They also provide opportunities for members to encourage one another and to express thanks to those committed to advancing the mission of the Church.
- During interviews for this Review, it was striking that virtually all interviewees noted that Synod should present an opportunity to celebrate examples of how the mission of the Church was being advanced successfully in the Dioceses. They believed that meetings of Synod should seek to inspire and encourage Synod members and others to advance the work of mission through this sharing of experience; that Synod meetings should equip Synod members and others for service and for action in the church and in the world beyond the church.

⁴ The Five Marks of Mission used by the churches of the Anglican communion are: (1) To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom; (2) To teach, baptise and nurture new believers; (3) To respond to human need by loving service; (4) To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and

pursue peace and reconciliation; (5) To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth. These are sometimes abbreviated as: Tell, Teach, Tend, Transform, Treasure.

How is the work of Synod conducted?

Anglican clergy, laity and their bishop who meet in a Diocesan Synod, conduct their deliberations in a distinctive way:

Firstly, members of synods believe that meetings of synods are blessed with the grace and presence of the Holy Spirit. The collects and prayers for use at the opening of a synod in the *Book of Common Prayer* ask that the Holy Spirit will grant synod members “a right judgement in all things”, and that the Holy Spirit will guide the members of synods in their deliberations. As Archbishop Jackson put it when speaking to the Diocesan Synod in 2018, members “come together to be transformed in and by the Holy Spirit”, they “show the glory of the body of Christ” and “prepare the way of the kingdom of God”.⁵

Box 2: Collects and prayers for a Synod

Almighty God, you have given your Holy Spirit to the Church to lead us into all truth: Bless with the Spirit's grace and presence the members of this Synod; keep us steadfast in faith and united in love, that we may manifest your glory and prepare the way of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.

The Book of Common Prayer, 2004

God, who from of old taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending them the light of your Holy Spirit: Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgement in all things and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour, who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

The Book of Common Prayer, 2004

A Thiarna Dia, a Athair na Soilse agus a Thobair na heagna uile, a gheall, trí do Mhac Íosa Críost, go mbeifeá in éineacht le Eaglais uilí go deireadh an tsaoil; Guímid go humhal Thú féachaint go ceansa ar na hEaspag, ar an gCléir, agus ar an bPobal, atá cruinnithe le céile i gcomhairle id Ainmse ar son na hEaglaise seo. Deonaigh go trócaireach go luí do Spioraid Naomh orthu, go soilsí agus go dtreoraí sé iad; agus go soirbhí ár gcomhairle ar fad chun d'onóra agus do ghlóire, agus chun leasa d'Eaglaise. Treoraigh sinn agus iadsan i dtreo na fírinne iomláine; chun go mbí buanchónaí go deo ag an Eaglais seo sa chreideamh Aspalda Fíorchaitliceach, agus í ag déanamh seirbhíse duit gan eagla le glaine adhartha agus beatha, de réir do thola naofa; trí Íosa Críost ár dTiarna agus ár Slánaitheoir. Áiméan.

Leabhar na hUrnaí Coitinne, 1965

Secondly, meetings of synods take place in the context of worship: the Standing Orders for the Diocesan Synod provide that Synod meetings open with a celebration of the Holy Communion and conclude with prayer. The celebration of the Eucharist at Diocesan Synod is possibly the only regular occasion at which representatives of every parish in the diocese come together for collective worship with their bishop. As such, worship at Synod provides the one of the best examples of the life of the eucharistic community that is the Church in all of the diocese.

⁵ Presidential address of Archbishop Michael Jackson to the 2017 Diocesan Synod. [Microsoft Word - dg-diocesan-presidential-address-17](#)

Thirdly, “bishops, clergy and laity ...share authority in synodical government”⁶. This emphasises the commitment in the Anglican tradition to the participation of the laity in Church governance and decision-making.

Fourthly, in Diocesan (and General) Synods, decision-making is sometimes formalised and parliamentary in style. However, as Dean Stephen Farrell has noted in an article in *Search: A Church of Ireland Journal* in 2024, from the time of the earliest synods, synodical decision making involves a process of listening and discernment as well as informed decision-making.⁷

A working definition of the purposes Diocesan Synod and how it is intended to operate

Based on our examination of the rules governing Synod and on the lived experiences of Synods in the past, the Review Group adopted this working definition of the purposes of Diocesan Synod and how it is intended to operate:

The Diocesan Synod

.....comprises the Archbishop, clergy and elected laity of the dioceses, meeting together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit

.....to worship, to celebrate, to listen, discern and make decisions....

.....to advance the mission of the Church, inspire the faith of the people of God, and provide good governance for the Church and its resources.

The Review Group used this working definition to examine the extent to which meetings of Synod, and especially Synod 2025 fulfilled the vision set out in this definition.

⁶ The Principles of Canon Law, Principle 15.9, cited in Stephen Farrell, “Synodality issues in the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland” in *Search: A Church of Ireland Journal*, vol.47.1, Spring 2024, p. 29.

⁷ Farrell writes:

When we look at the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, we see a Church Council addressing a doctrinal question raised by a dispute in the church at Antioch, and reaching a decision that was authoritative for the whole church. It is hard to get a clear sense of the composition of the Council, but the biblical text suggests a group of believers larger than the apostles and elders. The Council seeks to show that their conclusion is in conformity with the mind of God and the result of widespread agreement – “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us”. It is a good reminder ...that we cannot lose sight of discernment, however committed we may be to synodal decision-making.”

Ibid., p.36

4. Gathering together: How well does Diocesan Synod facilitate the meeting of Synod members?

Summary

This chapter is about the opportunities and practical challenges involved in bringing the members of Synod together. In the chapter, we

- Note the strong commitment to participate in the work of Synod among Synod members
- Examine the falling attendances among Synod members in recent years, despite this commitment
- Discuss how there is some evidence to suggest that holding Synod on a Saturday may have a positive impact on attendances
- Review what those who attended Synod 2025 have told us about the venue
- Identify the need for a more effective and cohesive approach to the organisation of Synod
- Discuss possible changes to the membership of Synod.

Synod members are strongly committed

Over 275 people are entitled to attend Diocesan Synod and large numbers of clergy and lay people do so each year. This demonstrates a strong commitment to participation in the work of the Synod. This needs to be acknowledged as a considerable strength and resource in the life of the Church in the Dioceses.

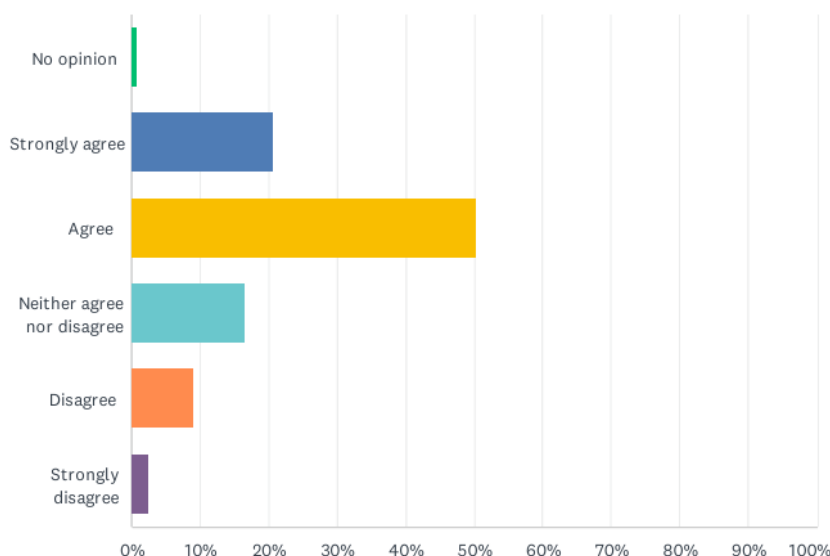
The data from the survey of Synod members contains positive messages about the commitment of Synod members to their involvement in Synod meetings. As Figure 1 shows, over 71% of those who attended Synod 2025 and who responded to the Survey felt that their experience was a positive one and just 9% disagreed.

Figure 2 shows that just under two-thirds (65%) of those who attended Synod 2025 and who responded to the Survey stated that their experience at Synod 2025 would make them likely to attend Synod in 2026. Over a quarter of those who attended and responded said their experience of Synod 2025 would make it likely that they would encourage others to attend Synod.

These are very positive findings about the general satisfaction of Synod members who attended Synod 2025 and shows we have a strong base on which to build improvements in the work of Synod.

Unfortunately, we only have survey responses from 39 of the 101 members (39%) who did not attend Synod 2025. They gave a range of reasons for their non-attendance, but because the response rate is so low, we can't be sure if their responses would be representative of all non-attendees.

Figure 1: Responses of those who attended Synod 2025 to the proposition that “My experience of Synods 2025 was positive”



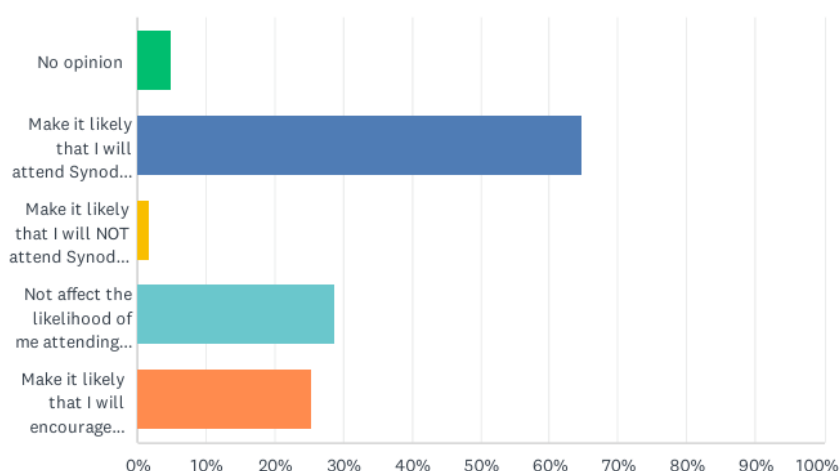
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
No opinion	0.83%	1
Strongly agree	20.66%	25
Agree	50.41%	61
Neither agree nor disagree	16.53%	20
Disagree	9.09%	11
Strongly disagree	2.48%	3
TOTAL		121

Note on survey data

126 (72%) of the 174 members who attended Synod 2025 responded to the survey of Synod members. This rate of return is satisfactory for an email survey, but the survey did not capture the views of all those who attended Synod 2025. It should also be noted that the respondents (both those who attended Synod 2025 and those who did not attend) were self-selecting – they cannot be considered as a statistically random sample, and unknown biases may have affected whether they did or did not respond to the survey. This means that we can be reasonably confident that the data from responses provided by Synod members who attended Synod 2025 and who completed the survey are likely to be broadly representative of the views of Synod members generally who attended Synod 2025. As you will see in the report we drew on the information from attendees at Synod 2025 as one of the sources to inform our Review and our recommendations.

Despite additional targeted emails and reminders, only 39 (39%) of the 101 members who did not attend Synod 2025, and who remained as members of Synod at the time of the survey, responded to the survey. This rate of return is much less satisfactory, and this means that we cannot be confident that the responses provided by Synod members who did not attend Synod 2025, but who nevertheless completed the survey, are representative of the views of Synod members who did not attend Synod 2025. For this reason, we cannot rely on this data and so, this Report makes very little use of this information. The Review Group suggests that in any future surveys of Synod members, additional dedicated ways are used to establish why some members of Synod do not attend. This was beyond the scope and resources of the Review on this occasion.

Figure 2: Responses of those who attended Synod 2025 when asked to respond to proposition “If I am re-elected or re-nominated to Diocesan Synods 2026, my experience of Synods 2025 will....



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
No opinion	4.92%	6
Make it likely that I will attend Synods in 2026	64.75%	79
Make it likely that I will NOT attend Synods 2026	1.64%	2
Not affect the likelihood of me attending Synods 2026	28.69%	35
Make it likely that I will encourage others to attend participate in future meetings of Synods	25.41%	31
Total Respondents: 122		

See note on survey data on page 14.

But attendances at Synod have been falling in recent years

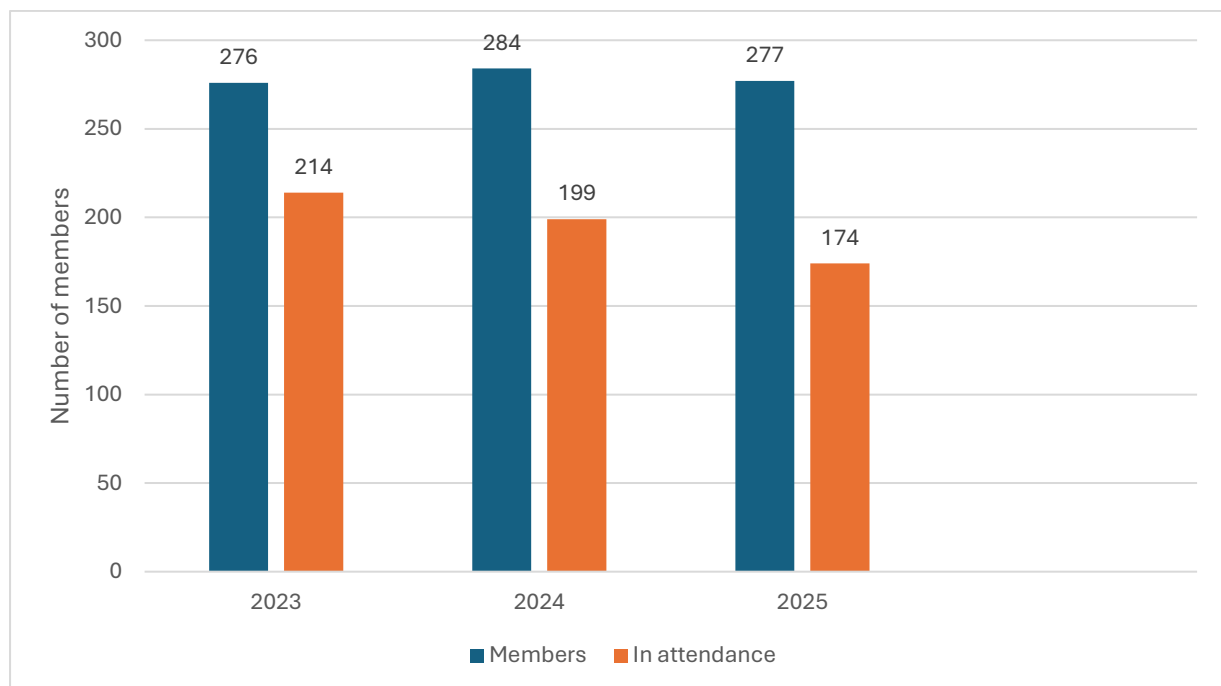
A significant proportion of members did not attend recent meetings of Synod. Figure 3 shows that the proportion in attendance has fallen over the current triennium from 78% in 2023 to 63% in 2025. Attendances fell among both clerical and lay members of Synod, as shown in Table 1.

Only limited information was available to the Review Group regarding comparative attendance data at other diocesan synods. In 2025, one of the other synods in the Southern Province recorded a much higher attendance rate of 86%, while a second diocese recorded a lower attendance at 61%. (Comparable attendance data was not available from the other two dioceses.)

The Review Group speculated that there might be a higher level of attendance in the initial year of a triennium and lower levels of attendance in the second and third years of each triennium. The figures for Dublin and Glendalough seem to support this proposition, but in the only other diocese for which we have longitudinal data, attendance remained consistent at 86% in 2023, 85% in 2024, and 86% in 2025. Unfortunately, we were unable to obtain information on attendances at the Dublin and Glendalough Diocesan Synod in previous triennia.

Gathering together: How well does Diocesan Synod facilitate the meeting of Synod members?

Figure 3: Total number of members of Synod and numbers attending, 2023-2025



Source: Dublin and Glendalough Diocesan Office

Table 1: Membership and attendance of clergy and laity at Diocesan Synod, 2023-2025

Clerical attendance, 2023-2025

2023			2024			2025		
Members	Present	%	Members	Present	%	Members	Present	%
82	60	73.17	83	53	63.86	77	48	62.34

Lay attendance, 2023-2025

2023			2024			2025		
Members	Present	%	Members	Present	%	Members	Present	%
194	154	79.38	201	146	72.64	200	126	63.00

Total attendance, 2023-2025

2023			2024			2025		
Members	Present	%	Members	Present	%	Members	Present	%
276	214	77.54%	284	199	70.07%	277	174	62.82

Source: Dublin and Glendalough Diocesan Office

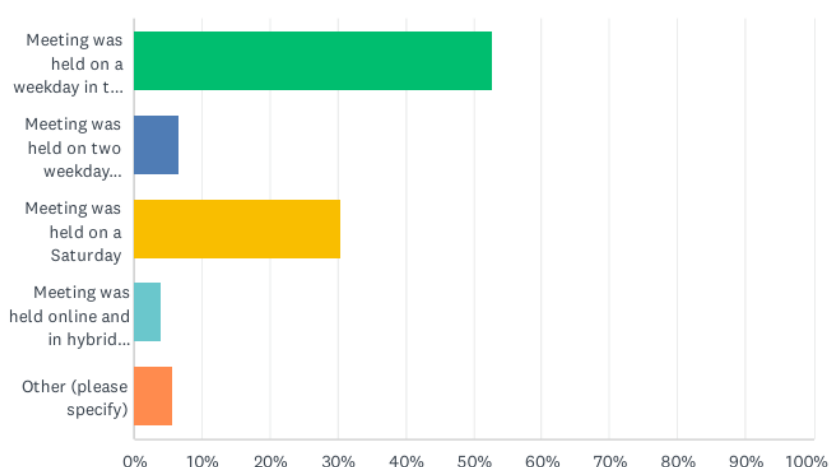
The day and timing of the Synod meeting may be a factor

The Review Group believes that there is probably a range of reasons why attendance at Synod has fallen in recent years. One factor may be the day on which the meeting of Synod is held. In recent years, the Diocesan Synod in Dublin and Glendalough has been held on a Tuesday afternoon and evening, beginning with a celebration of Holy Communion at 4pm and concluding no later than 10pm.

We asked the Diocesan Secretaries in the other four dioceses in the Southern Province about the day on which they held their Synod. Three of them told us their Diocesan Synods are always held on Saturdays. In the fourth diocese, Synod is held on Saturdays in alternate years. All four Diocesan Secretaries told us that holding Synods on weekdays would adversely affect attendance, especially the attendance of members who are working.

We expected that holding the Synod on a weekday evening as at present would suit those who attended Synod 2025. A majority of Synod members who responded to the survey and who attended Synod 2025 (53%) confirmed that they would prefer to hold the Synod on a weekday afternoon and evening. However, almost a third (31%) of those who attended Synod 2025 and who responded to the survey would prefer to hold Synod on a Saturday. (See Figure 4.)

Figure 4: Responses of those who attended Synod 2025 to proposition “If I am re-elected to Diocesan Synods 2026, I would be more inclined to attend if...”



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Meeting was held on a weekday in the late afternoon and evening, as at present	52.89%	64
Meeting was held on two weekday evenings	6.61%	8
Meeting was held on a Saturday	30.58%	37
Meeting was held online and in hybrid format	4.13%	5
Other (please specify)	5.79%	7
TOTAL		121

See note on survey data on page 14.

Three comments written in the open comment questions in the survey supported a move to holding the Synod on a Saturday. Four of the nine people interviewed for the Review noted that moving to a Saturday would provide greater time for discussion, interaction and social engagement, and a fifth interviewee described moving to a Saturday as a “genius thing”.

“I would welcome consideration of holding synods on a Saturday, although I suspect that this might be less popular with clergy (and possibly retired lay members of Synods) than it might be with those who need to leave work early to attend on a Tuesday.”
(Survey comment)

“Holding any type of meeting during typical working hours will mean younger voices will be unable to attend. Indeed, often I feel that's the point. It is a positive feedback loop. The people who can attend are the very people who are person [sic] not concerned with having to take time off work. This means voices of members of the church who work full time (outside of the church) are likely diluted.” (Survey comment)

The Review Group is conscious that there may be reasons other than the day on which Synod is held that affect attendance. Too small a proportion of those who did not attend Synod 2025 responded to our survey, so we cannot be certain that the views they shared with us are representative of all those who did not attend. However, even the small sample (24) of members who provided information to us on why they did not attend mentioned a range of reasons as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Reasons for non-attendance given by those who did not attend Synod 2025 and who responded to the Survey (respondents could tick multiple reasons)

Reason for non-attendance	Number of respondents citing this reason
Location of meeting did not suit me	4
Date of meeting did not suit me	8
Time of meeting did not suit me	5
I was too busy to attend	4
I felt discussions at previous Synods were not relevant to me	1
I didn't feel my attendance mattered	3
My experience at previous Synods put me off	1
Other	
Personal or family illness	6
Travel difficulties	3
Other business prevented me from attending	2

See note on survey data on page 14. Just 24 of the 101 synod members who did not attend Synod 2025 responded to this question about reasons for their non-attendance. This rate of return means that cannot be confident that the responses provided by Synod members who did not attend Synod 2025, but who nevertheless completed the survey, are representative of the views of Synod members who did not attend Synod 2025.

Very few of those who responded to the Survey and who had attended Synod 2025 (just five members) expressed a preference for the meeting to be held in hybrid format. Eight of the members who attended in 2025 and who responded to the survey would like Synod to be held on two consecutive evenings.

Taking all this information into account, and especially the experience of other Diocesan Synods, the Review Group concluded that it would be worthwhile to hold Synod on a Saturday on a trial basis, at least once in the incoming triennium. We discuss this further in Recommendation 9 in Chapter 7.

Getting the venue right is important

Synod members were satisfied with the venue for the 2025 Synod at the King's Hospital School. 81% of those who attended Synod 2025 and who responded to the survey were satisfied or very satisfied with the venue.

Survey respondents who had attended Synod 2025 praised the welcome from the school community in a number of comments. Respondents were especially positive about the meal (96% satisfied or very satisfied), and in general were positive about the meeting facilities (86% satisfied or very satisfied).

"Most impressed with the way that the pupils looked after us". (Survey comment)

"The KH students were very friendly and helpful." (Survey comment)

It was lovely to have their students taking part in service of the meal, directing people to venues and engaging with us at the breakouts. Their chapel was a lovely size for the group and their choir was very good." (Survey comment)

A small number of positive comments (three) were made about the tiered seating in the Auditorium/Hall but several comments (10) criticised the tiered layout. Some felt that the tiered arrangement inhibited members from moving to the rostrum to speak and participate in debates. Another thought that egress from the seating area was difficult and likely to be unsuitable in an emergency. One said that the lower floor should have had reserved spaces for disabled or less able members. This criticism of the tiered seating was echoed in two of the nine interviews.

Nine comments were received about the breakout facilities. There was some criticism of the breakout spaces from those whose groups met in the main dining hall (they stated that the room was too noisy and the groups too large) but those accommodated in the classrooms praised these facilities.

The single issue that gave rise to the largest number of comments was parking arrangements. 21 survey respondents provided comments on this issue. Three praised the parking facilities but 18 were critical of the delays on arrival.

Other suggestions emerging in comments submitted by respondents suggested that holding the Synod in different schools was a good idea and that the venue should alternate between the Dublin and Glendalough dioceses.

Need for proactive, strategic approach to the organisation of Synod

The summoning and organisation of Synod is a considerable logistical and organisational task. The practical work involved falls almost exclusively on the staff of the Diocesan Office. 72% of members who attended Synod 2025 and who responded to the survey agreed or strongly agreed that the business of Synod 2025 had been organised efficiently. This is a strong endorsement of the logistical and organisational work of the small team in the Diocesan Office.

Three different bodies – the Archbishop, the Honorary Secretaries and the Diocesan Office – have responsibilities for calling Synod, arranging its agenda and organising its business. The Diocesan Council may also be consulted though it has no formal role in determining the business of Synod.

However, it appears that the four bodies involved in organising the Synod – the Archbishop, the Honorary Secretaries, the Diocesan Office and to a lesser extent the Diocesan Council – do not collaborate closely and in an organised way to provide a single, coherent direction for the work of the Synod.

During the interviews conducted for this Review it was striking that among those involved in summoning and organising meetings of Synod, individuals had different and, at times, vague understandings regarding their own responsibilities and those of others. Interviewees told us about the parallel consultations or discussions that take place between the Honorary Secretaries and the Diocesan Secretary on the one hand, and between the Diocesan Secretary and the Archbishop on the other.

The Review Group believes that the current approach to organising Synod lacks cohesion and a strong central direction. This approach runs the risk that agendas and formats are repeated from year to year, and a clear sense of purpose is not established.

We believe that a more effective and cohesive approach to the organisation of annual Synod meetings is required. This approach should provide clear direction and inspire a collaborative, reflective spirit. It should ensure that ongoing improvements are well implemented. This approach would help Synod to advance more effectively the Mission of the Church in parishes and throughout the Dioceses, and make the logistical tasks of the Diocesan Office more practicable.

Membership of Synod; Youth engagement

The Review Group considered two suggestions made to us during the interviews and in a written comment in the survey regarding possible alterations in the membership of Synod. However, we considered that neither should be implemented at the current time. The Review Group felt that reducing the representation of cures or parishes from three lay persons for every one clerical representative to two lay persons for every one clerical representative would run counter to any efforts to increase participation in meetings of Synod.⁸ We also believe that introducing fixed-term

⁸ The *Constitution of the Church of Ireland* [Chapter II, section 5] provides that each diocese may decide the number of lay people who may be elected from each cure (in most cases a “cure” is equivalent to a parish). This

membership of Synod (for example, limiting membership to not more than two three-year terms) would be impractical at present.

Synod members who had attended Synod 2025 and who responded to the survey welcomed the participation of young people from the secondary school in the discussions at Synod 2025. Some commented that the participation of young people at Synod should be encouraged. Some comments in three of the interviews also touched on the topic of encouraging younger members but acknowledged the challenges of doing this successfully. The Review Group believes that calls for younger people to be involved in Synod are well meant, and that steps can be taken to begin to address this issue. However, we are also convinced that there are no easy solutions to this issue. We examine this issue more fully in Recommendation 10 in Chapter 7.

The absence of guests from other churches and faith communities at the Dublin and Glendalough Diocesan Synod was raised with us. This came up in one of the interviews and in one of the comments made in the survey. When we examined the issue, we found that ecumenical guests were invited to some other Diocesan Synods, and we learned that ecumenical guests have been a valued part of General Synod for many years. We believe that inviting such guests would be a positive step.

number may be “not less than two, and not more than five, synod members for each member of the clergy normally officiating in such cure.” The Standing Orders of the Dublin and Glendalough Diocesan Synod provide that each cure is entitled to elect three lay persons to attend Diocesan Synod for each member of the clergy normally officiating in the cure (parish). In practice, therefore, parishes are represented by their clergy and three lay members for every one member of the parish’s clergy.

5. How well does Diocesan Synod fulfil its purposes?

Summary

This chapter looks at how well the Synod fulfils its purposes:

- Members come together at Diocesan Synod to worship, to advance the mission of the Church, to inspire and communicate the faith of the people of God, and to provide good governance for the Church and accountability for the management of its resources.
- Among synod members who attended Synod 2025 and who responded to the survey, and among interviewees, our Review revealed varying levels of satisfaction with the way in which these purposes of Synod are achieved.

Worship

Figure 5 shows that 74% of members who attended Synod 2025 and who responded to the Survey were positive about the Holy Communion Service held at the opening of Synod 2025. In comments, five members commented favourably on the school chapel, the school choir and on the service in general. Just two comments suggested that the service took up too much of the available time. One comment suggested it was inappropriate to “rate a Communion Service.”

Presidential address

63% of Synod members who attended Synod 2025 and who responded to the survey reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the Presidential address. Two members expressed reservations about being asked about their satisfaction with the address.

Three interviewees highlighted the importance of the Presidential address and noted it was a key opportunity for the Archbishop to set out a vision for the work of the Church in the dioceses for the incoming year. A number of comments in the survey (seven) suggested that the content of the address was important and helpful, but too long, or that its delivery should have been supported by technology (such as Powerpoint, etc.) A small number suggested it would be better to have the address in the meeting hall rather than in the church or school chapel.

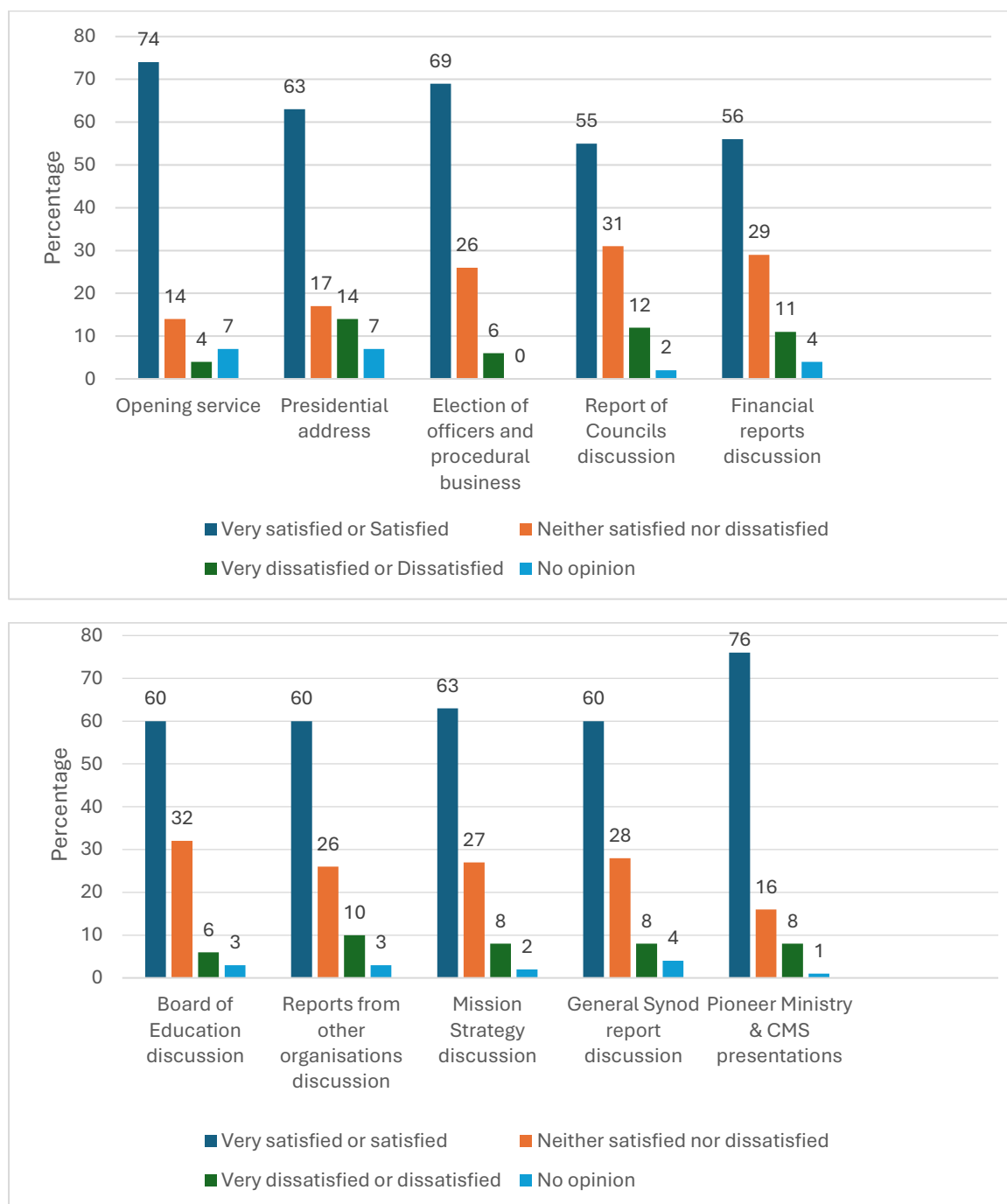
Governance and accountability

The agenda of Synod 2025 and recent Synod meetings show that items related to governance (election of officers, procedural business, reporting from General Synod, etc.) and accountability (presentation of reports, approval of financial accounts, etc.) were completed as required by the *Constitution*, Standing Orders and charities legislation.

However, as you can see in Figure 5, less than two-thirds of those who had attended Synod 2025 and who responded to the Survey were satisfied with many of the main business items of Synod. This was a common pattern across almost all the main elements of the meeting: the discussion on reports of Council and financial statements, the discussion on the report of the Board of Education, the discussion of reports from other Diocesan organisations, and the discussion on the Mission Strategy. Higher proportions of members were satisfied with the elections and procedural matters (69%), and with the presentations from external speakers (76%).

How well does Diocesan Synod fulfil its purposes?

Figure 5: Satisfaction of attendees at Synod 2025 with elements of the business of Synod (percentages rounded to nearest whole percentage)



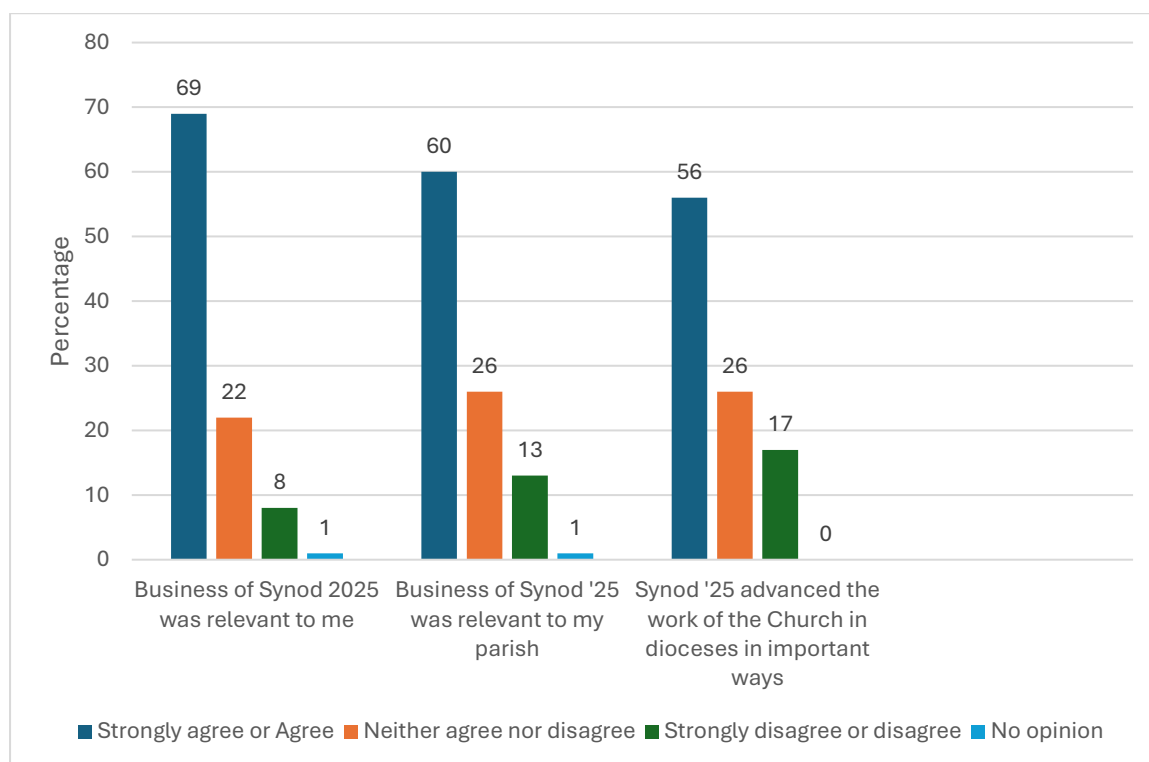
See note on survey data on page 14. The total number of Synod members who responded about each of the elements of Synod above were:

Opening service	121	Board of Education discussion	119
Presidential address	121	Reports from other organisations discussion	121
Election of officers and procedural business	121	Mission strategy discussion	121
Reports of Councils discussion	121	General Synod report discussion	120
Financial reports discussion	121	Pioneer Ministry and CMS presentations	119

Advancing the Mission of the Church

At least some of the dissatisfaction with the agenda items may be linked to the degree to which Synod members felt the business of Synod was relevant to them, their parishes and the dioceses. When asked to rate the relevance of the Synod, 69% of Survey respondents who attended the Synod strongly agreed or agreed that it was relevant to them, but just 60% strongly agreed or agreed that was relevant to their parish and only 56% thought it was relevant to advancing the work of the Church in the dioceses. Around 40% of respondents who attended held negative views or non-committal views regarding the relevance of Synod to their parishes and the work of the Church in the dioceses (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Responses of those who attended Synod 2025 when asked about the relevance of Synod



See note on survey data on page 14. 121 synod members responded to each of the above statements.

Suggestions were made in the written comments from respondents to the Survey that fundamental changes are needed in the business of Synod. Some pointed to the need for Synod to provide opportunities to discuss and share information about how to advance the Mission of the Church in parishes and the dioceses; others suggested that discussions need to be more “forward-focussed” and inspiring of action at local level.

A number of interviewees also spoke about the opportunity presented by Synod to enable members to share experiences about how they are advancing the Mission of the Church in many different ways in parishes. They believed that members could learn from one another and come away from Synod inspired to take action in their localities.

How well does Diocesan Synod fulfil its purposes?

"I'd like there to be more engagement in finding out how parishes are really getting on – day to day – by talking to one another." (Survey comment)

"There should be a greater focus on how the dioceses might support parishes and an awareness of the difficulties faced by select vestries in meeting financial, organisational and administrative needs of parishes." (Survey comment)

"Personally, the best part of the Synod...is the remarks from the floor over the reports. We get a better idea of the concerns of the Dioceses, the parishes and the clergy." (Survey comment)

"We had a great chance to exchange ideas and compare notes with other parishes over the delightful meal we were given. That was very worthwhile. Also, the small group discussions were very interesting and helpful. It's so much easier to have really worthwhile discussions on things that really affect us, if we're sitting in a circle in small groups, with a good facilitator." (Survey comment)

"The biggest concern is churchgoing numbers are declining. I see how the new Pioneer Ministry is working on that. I would be interested to hear at the Synod ideas of how to get people who are part of a parish to return to church on a weekly or monthly basis." (Survey comment)

"More inputs on initiatives in parishes and other dioceses. Less regurgitation of what is in the *Book of Reports*. Each synod to have a very clear theme/objective." (Survey comment)

"[Synod] can and should be a brilliant platform for parishes....as a way of sharing and learning among parishes. This should be emphasised more." (Interview)

"Synod should be encouraging of Synod members and work in parishes...we should celebrate what individuals and local groups are doing in the community – showcase social action by the people of the Church of Ireland." (Interview)

"...members should be asked what areas they are interested in and what ideas they may have, how the Church of Ireland can improve and what positive views the members see the Church being like in 20 years time. The current way that reports are formed (purely looking backwards) does not inspire people to feel that they have anything to add. The church must be forward looking and tackle the issues that concern its members." (Survey comment)

"Synod should be a way to inform Synod members – clergy and laity – and the broader church. It could be a learning site: we could use it to have information sessions/presentations, with Q & A, to inform people about how the Church works and what work it is doing. Could provide helpful and practical advice." (Interview)

Communicating and inspiring action

If Diocesan Synod is to have a positive impact, then it has to facilitate good communication about the work of the Church. It should celebrate successes in advancing all aspects of the Marks of Mission, and inform people about how the challenges facing the Church may be tackled. In this way, Synod can inspire action and contribute to strengthening faith.

The main publication associated with the Synod is the *Book of Reports*. A great deal of time and effort goes into compiling and editing the *Book of Reports* and it contains much detailed information about the work of Diocesan bodies. However, it needs a significant overhaul of its content and presentation. The Review Group learned that other dioceses have invested considerably in the design and production quality of their books of reports. Because these publications are attractive and accessible, they are suitable for circulation beyond Synod members to parishes, and they can help to disseminate the work of the Synods and the Church in their dioceses.

In contrast, in Dublin and Glendalough, the format and content of the *Book of Reports* have remained unchanged for some time. Its design is outdated, as some comments in the survey highlighted, and it does not conform to good accessibility standards. A comment was also made that the reports in the *Book of Reports* needed to look forwards as well as reporting on work completed. In this way, the member argued, discussion of the reports could facilitate discussions about what committees and Diocesan bodies were planning to do in the future.

“... while the *Book of Reports* has to include a report of what committees have done over the past year, it should include a significant element of what they are going to work at over the coming year. the current way that reports are formed (purely looking backwards) does not inspire people to feel that they have anything to add. The church must be forward looking and tackle the issues that concern its members.” (Survey comment)

Work should be done on the *Book of Reports*. It's a lot of work but I imagine largely unread. A more accessible and attractive version would make a difference. (Survey comment)

“Re the *Book of Reports* – can a more visual presentation/Powerpoint be brought out for those of us who are dyslexic?” (Survey comment)

There was strong evidence from seven of the interviews that the articles published on the Diocesan website and in the *Church Review* following Synod meetings provide excellent accounts of the business transacted at Synod. However, some comments in the survey and arising from interviews suggested that more was needed. The Review Group heard comments that Synod members need to be equipped to share their experiences and information from the Synod with their parish congregations and select vestries. Suggestions included providing an attractive, well-designed pack to Synod members prior to Synod and following up with information notes in the aftermath of Synod that would enable Synod members to share information about Synod and the work of the Dioceses with their parishes and congregations.

6. How effectively is Diocesan Synod conducted?

Summary

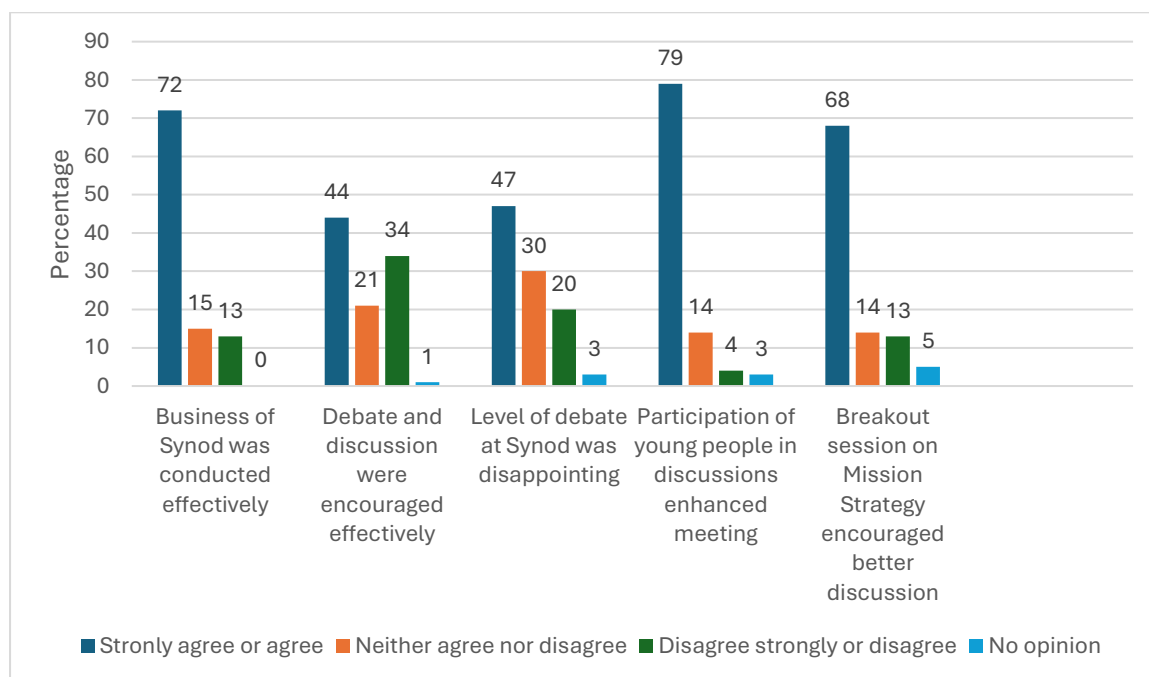
This chapter looks at the way that the business of Synod is conducted. We consider:

- How well debate and discussion are encouraged
- Whether breakout sessions worked at Synod 2025, and why
- The importance of listening, discernment and informed decision-making
- The need to help new members to learn about how Synod works and how they can engage fully in it
- The importance of Synod as a social event in the life of the Church.

Debate and discussion

Given the range of functions that Synod must fulfil, it's not surprising that the organisers find it challenging to satisfy the preferences and needs of members. As you will see in Figure 7 a large majority of members (72%) who attended Synod 2025 and responded to the Survey were satisfied that the business of Synod is conducted effectively. There was also praise in one comment in the survey for the effective and efficient chairing of the meeting.

Figure 7: Responses of those who attended Synod 2025 about the way in which Synod business was conducted



See note on survey data on page 14. 120 Synod members responded to the statement "Debate and discussion were encouraged effectively". 121 members responded to each of the other statements above.

However, less than half of those who attended Synod 2025 and who responded to the Survey thought that debate and discussion were encouraged effectively at Synod 2025. A third (34%) disagreed or disagreed strongly that debate and discussion were encouraged at Synod 2025. Given how important

listening, discussion and discernment are meant to be in the work of any synod, the level of dissatisfaction with discussion at Diocesan Synod is worrying.

Using breakout sessions

As you can see in Figure 7, members who attended Synod 2025 reacted very positively to the breakout session on the Mission Strategy which was deliberately structured to facilitate discussion. In addition, these members welcomed the participation of young people in the discussions.

However, comments from some members were critical of the breakout sessions. Criticisms included the unsuitability of some of the spaces used, poor chairing and facilitation, and too little time for meaningful listening and engagement. This shows us that adopting breakout sessions without adequate planning and preparation will not solve the problems we have regarding how Synod business is conducted.

"[Was] surprised at how few people got up to speak." (Survey comment)

"Breakout sessions worked very well with good discussion points and good points for consideration." (Survey comment)

"Discussion on both sides should be encouraged so as to avoid group think. There is a sense that discussion is not required and that endorsement only is sought. Contrarian voices that provoke thought are a legitimate part of the process." (Survey comment)

"We did have a discussion for about half an hour in small groups and it was brilliant – just not long enough." (Survey comment)

"The breakout groups and the discussions were a positive addition." (Survey comment)

"The breakout groups were excellent this year." (Survey comment)

"Not happy about the 'breakout' discussions which [needed] more active and concise conducting. Advance topics might improve matters. Some good contributions nonetheless." (Survey comment)

"I would like to suggest the breakout group exercise is never, ever repeated. This is a banal exercise dripping in smug, patronising corporate managerialism, which some of us already have to put up with in the workplace." (Survey comment)

"Breakout groups were well meant. But the time was so short which rendered them ineffective and being potentially labelled as tokenism." (Survey comment)

Listening, discernment and informed decision-making

Synod members responding to the Survey believe that we can improve the way we engage in listening, discernment, discussion and informed decision-making. Their suggestions include: allocating additional time for discussions; identifying a variety of possible speakers to initiate discussions (and not the “usual suspects”); and creating a less formal and more interactive environment for listening, discussion and engagement.

A number of comments (seven) were made suggesting that greater use should be made of technology to support presentations.

“Delegates come to listen but most also like to participate. And interaction should be a valuable and healthy part of Synod.” (Survey comment)

“The Synod is packed with presentations but not enough discussion. It’s too long a meeting to feel worth raising one’s hand to lengthen it further and there is little breathing room for natural development. The strategy discussion was a lovely opportunity for collaboration and community but very rushed, for example. One leaves Synod feeling slightly more informed but only as an audience for reports not [a] contributor to the life of the Church.”(Survey comment)

There needs to be a range of ways found to include people in engagement. Old style debate is not for everyone. Following very good speeches proposing reports, we had a set of speeches from the various speakers which were generally pretty predictable and none of which was going to set the hall alight with something new or compelling. In other large meetings I attend people can use things like Mentimeter to contribute using their phones and this really helps engagement. Breakouts are great also so long as the spaces allow seating for all and noise levels are managed (not the case in the dining hall in Kings Hospital - small rooms would have been preferable). A good facilitator is essential but that is easily arranged.”(Survey comment)

Social interaction; Confidence and capacity to participate

Some of the comments made to the Review Group through the survey confirm that Synod provides an important opportunity for social interaction among Church members across the Dioceses. That said, there is a risk that we can take it for granted that Synod is a welcoming place. A small number of comments show that some newer members may be at a loss to understand what is going on, or worse, may feel isolated or ignored.

How effectively is Diocesan Synod conducted?

"The compelling part of the meeting is to catch up with people and meet new people (which is important)." (Survey comment)

"It would be nice if someone was available to actively welcome newcomers to Synod. Attendance can feel a little overwhelming as a newcomer." (Survey comment)

"I'd like meetings to be more 'people-friendly'. for newcomers to the Synod, it seems to be a question of finding your own way round on how the system works. However, I found people much friendlier this time. The previous one I was at (and I've only ever been at two) if people didn't know you, you were as good as invisible." (Survey comment)

"It was great to have the meal where people could meet up and chat to discuss Synod topics. The free meal was great and would encourage people to come again." (Survey comment)

"It would be nice if someone was available to actively welcome newcomers to Synod. Attendance can feel a little overwhelming as a newcomer." (Survey comment)

If I didn't have people from my own parish coming with me, I wouldn't go on my own. People just don't notice you and you can feel very alone." (Survey comment)

The Review Group believes that Synod should take deliberate steps to foster a welcoming environment in which members can feel encouraged and confident to participate. The need for an induction session for new members is evident, and we think steps should be taken to welcome new members and help them to get to know their fellow Synod members.

7. Recommendations

Summary

The Review Group believes that Synod members value the opportunities that Synod provides and want it to evolve to better meet their needs and the needs of the Church.

Our recommendations are designed to build on the existing strengths of the Diocesan Synod. We know that our suggestions must respect the Constitutional and legal obligations that Synod must satisfy. We believe that it is possible to do that while improving how the Synod works to advance the mission of the Church in the coming years.

The recommendations are offered for the consideration of Archbishop Jackson, President of the Diocesan Synod, and the members of Diocesan Councils.

Our recommendations fall into eleven themes. We believe that those responsible for leading and organising Synod should:

- (1) Adopt a proactive approach to the summoning, organisation and ongoing review of the Diocesan Synod
- (2) Strengthen the sense of community among Synod members and develop a commitment to a shared purpose among members
- (3) Strengthen the capacity and confidence of Synod members to engage in the work of Synod
- (4) Strengthen the way in which the business of Synod is conducted
- (5) Ensure a balance in the range of issues discussed at Synod
- (6) Maximise the potential of the Presidential address to inform the work of the Synod, to stimulate engagement and to exemplify the desired nature and purpose of the Synod
- (7) Maximise the potential of discussions on the reports submitted by Diocesan Council and diocesan organisations, and improve significantly the *Book of Reports*
- (8) Improve communication of the work and outcomes of Diocesan Synod to parishes
- (9) Improve access to, and practical arrangements at, meetings of Synod
- (10) Invite ecumenical guests to participate in Synod and take steps to encourage greater youth engagement
- (11) Provide adequate resourcing to enable these improvements to be made.

Recommendation 1

Adopt a proactive approach to the summoning, organisation and ongoing review of the Diocesan Synod

The Review Group believes that clear direction and a strong impetus will be required to bring about change and improvement in the work of Diocesan Synod. This will require a consistent focus from a small, dedicated group that will support the staff of the Diocesan Office, the Archbishop and the officers of Diocesan Synod. We recommend that the President and Diocesan Councils should:

- Establish a dedicated working group (the Diocesan Synod Organising Team) to manage and organise the meetings of Diocesan Synod; this group should
 - Respect fully the constitutional role and the spiritual leadership of the Archbishop as President of the Diocesan Synod, and the roles of the Archbishop and Honorary Secretaries in arranging the business of Synod
 - Include in its membership the President, the Honorary Secretaries, one further member of Councils, one member who is not a member of Councils, and the Diocesan Secretary
 - Incorporate and build on the work currently undertaken by the Honorary Secretaries and the Diocesan Secretary to organise the meetings of Synod
 - Draw up the agenda for the meeting, publicise the date for Synod well in advance, and communicate with Synod members on a number of occasions in advance of Synod to encourage attendance, stimulate interest and create a sense of expectation about the forthcoming meeting
 - Research and make recommendations to Councils regarding the venue to be used; ensure the provision of facilities, technology, etc.
 - Encourage a range of speakers to contribute to discussions (see below)
 - Prepare thoroughly for breakout sessions/small group sessions (see below)
 - Organise induction briefings for new members (see below)
 - Review the outcomes of each Synod to inform planning for subsequent years
 - Oversee surveys of members from time to time about their experiences of Synod and use these to inform future planning
 - Brief Diocesan Councils regularly on their ongoing work.

Recommendation 2

Strengthen the sense of community among Synod members and develop a commitment to a shared purpose among members

The Review Group recommends that the Diocesan Synod Organising Team (proposed in recommendation (1) above) and the members of Councils should:

- Engage all members of Diocesan Synods in shaping and adopting a clear understanding of the way in which Diocesan Synod operates and the functions that it is intended to fulfil
 - Consider sharing findings from the Review of Diocesan Synods with Synod members

Recommendations

- Include discussion of the suggested recommendations with Synod members in a session that encourages listening, discernment and reflection
 - Consider amending Standing Orders to incorporate a statement or statements defining the way in which Diocesan Synod operates and the functions that it is intended to fulfil
- Emphasise to all members that Synod takes place in the context of worship; that the celebration of the Eucharist at Synod is a unique opportunity for representatives from all parishes in the dioceses to take part in collective worship; and encourage participation in the opening service
- Prior to the commencement of worship and before the beginning of business, ask members of Synod to greet and introduce themselves to those adjacent to them in the church or meeting hall and to welcome new members especially
- Provide members with badges on which their first names appear in large prominent print to help members greet each other in a friendly way
- Maintain connection with Synod members throughout the year by providing them with updates (for example two/three short messages during the year) on the work of Councils, and on any follow-through that has been taken on decisions made at Synod.

Recommendation 3

Strengthen the capacity and confidence of Synod members to engage in the work of Synod

The Review Group recommends that the Diocesan Synod Organising Team should take definitive steps to strengthen the capacity and confidence of Synod members to engage in the work of Synod. These steps could include the following:

- Provide an online induction briefing for all new members of Diocesan Synods in the first year of each triennium to:
 - Brief them on how the Synod is intended to operate – including the importance of listening, discernment and informed decision making – and how best they can contribute
 - Outline the range of issues that the Synod is likely to discuss
 - Encourage their participation in plenary and small group sessions
 - Explain how they may put forward matters for discussion
 - Provide them with advice and information on practical issues such as travel to the venue, parking, registration of attendance, meals, voting, etc.
 - Create an expectation among Synod members that they should report back to their parishes
- Make the induction briefing for new members available to all Synod members in 2026
- Develop a FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) sheet for Synod members summarising key information for Synod members (similar to that provided in the online briefing)
- Include sessions in the business of Synod from time to time on how other synods and faith communities have encouraged deep listening, discernment and informed decision-making in their practice

- Identify and encourage in advance potential speakers to initiate discussions and contributions; when identifying such speakers, prioritise those who have not had speaking opportunities in the past
- Provide opportunities for Synod members to report back to future meetings of Synod on how they have shared the outcomes of Synod with their parish communities and the impact that this has had.

Recommendation 4

Strengthen the way in which the business of Synod is conducted

The Review Group recommends that:

- The time devoted to strictly procedural matters (elections, nominations) during the business of Synod should be minimised by using postal voting as much as possible
- A range of approaches should be used to facilitate the work of the Synod and to encourage listening, discernment and informed decision-making: a mixture of plenary and small group discussions/workshops, presentations, etc. should be used
- When small group discussions are utilised, these should be prepared thoroughly in advance (clear purpose; facilitators and recorders identified and well briefed in advance; members assigned in advance to groups; clear arrangements for the recording of discussions and, if appropriate, feedback to plenary sessions; suitable venues)
- Information and communications technology should be used *as appropriate* to support presentations and facilitate engagement. From time to time, this might include the use of Powerpoint to support the Presidential address and the presentation of financial and other reports. Sometimes, an application like Mentimeter could be used to collect feedback from small group discussions.

Recommendation 5

Ensure a balance in the range of issues discussed at Synod

The Review Group recommends that the Diocesan Synod Organising Team should take steps to achieve a better balance in the issues considered at Diocesan Synod:

- While continuing to include on the agenda any items required by legislative or regulatory provisions, the Diocesan Synod Organising Team should ensure that the range of issues and business included on the agenda of Synod achieves a balance between topics that will advance the mission of the Church in the Dioceses and parishes, as well as issues of governance and accountability
- Items that facilitate the sharing of experience about how the Five Marks of the Mission of the Church may be advanced at parish and local level should be included on the agenda and prioritised in discussions.

Recommendation 6

Maximise the potential of the Presidential address to inform the work of the Synod, to stimulate engagement and to exemplify the desired nature and purpose of the Synod

The Review Group is very conscious of the unique leadership role that the President of the Synod plays and notes the hope expressed by Archbishop Jackson at Synod 2025 that “we might have an entirely different type of Synod” in 2026.⁹ The Group appreciates that decisions regarding the content and delivery of the President’s address to Synod must remain very personal to them as they are guided by the Holy Spirit. The evidence collected during the Review confirms the value and importance that Synod members attach to the Presidential address, and the Review Group offers the following suggestions, merely to increase its potential impact. The suggestions that may be considered to enhance the delivery and content of the presentation include:

- Delivering the address in the meeting room (rather than in the church or school chapel) to facilitate greater integration of the address in the discussions of Synod
- Identifying and signalling at the outset a limited number of clear “take-away” messages in the address
- Limiting the time devoted to “straight presentation/lecture style” delivery
- Utilising technology to support the presentation (for example, Powerpoint) when appropriate
- Making available a written summary or relevant Powerpoint slides at, or immediately following, the presentation
- Creating opportunities for the address to be more integrated into the discussions of Synod, including time for discussion and reflection about some of the themes raised in the Presidential address
- Communicating the key messages from the address to members of Synod and more widely using social and other media.

⁹ Presidential Address of Archbishop Michael Jackson at Diocesan Synods 2025 available at [diocesan.synod.address.25.3.03.03.25.docx](https://www.catholic.org.uk/media/25.3.03.03.25.docx)

Recommendation 7

Maximise the potential of discussions on the reports submitted by Diocesan Council and diocesan organisations, and improve significantly the *Book of Reports*

To enhance the discussion on the reports submitted by Diocesan Councils and other bodies, the Review Group recommends that the Diocesan Synod Organising Team should:

- Improve the design, presentation and production quality of the *Book of Reports* and other documentation provided to members:
 - Redesign the *Book of Reports* and other documents to improve their accessibility for all Synod members. The documents should adhere to the principles recommended in a Universal Design Approach.¹⁰ This will include, for example, better layout of pages, larger formats, changes to the font used, and simpler, well-edited language throughout
 - Provide the *Book of Reports* and other documentation in electronic as well as hard copy versions for environmental and accessibility reasons. The costs of printing and postage may be reduced and e-copies can enable members to vary the size of text and use applications that can read text for visually impaired members
 - Give consideration to complementing the *Book of Reports* with summaries and/or Powerpoint presentations
- Provide clear guidance to organisations reporting to Diocesan Synod through the *Book of Reports*: this guidance should:
 - Set reasonable but short limits for the length of reports
 - Encourage the use of graphical presentation and illustration where appropriate
 - Emphasise that reports should report briefly on work completed in the previous year; look forward to the work that is planned for the incoming year; and illustrate how the work of the organisation may support the mission work of parishes and the dioceses
 - Share guidance on the use of simple, clear language with the authors of reports and edit reports carefully to improve the accessibility and legibility of the *Book of Reports*
- Consider grouping reports from Diocesan organisations thematically in the *Book of Reports* and encourage discussion of the reports through the use of motions or resolutions on each theme.

¹⁰ The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) at the National Disability Authority (NDA) publishes *Customer Communications Toolkit for Services to the Public – A Universal Design Approach*. This provides detailed advice and guidance on how to make documents and other communications accessible for all users. It is available at [Customer Communications Toolkit - Centre for Excellence in Universal Design](#).

Recommendation 8

Improve the communication of the work and outcomes of Diocesan Synod to parishes

The Review Group recommends that the Diocesan Synod Organising Team should:

- Collaborate closely with the Diocesan Communications officer
- Continue to arrange that articles on the work of Synod are published in the *Church Review* magazine
- Provide a short summary of the outcomes of Synod to each Synod member in a convenient format (short written summary, message for use on social media, etc.) that could be used to brief select vestries and church congregations
- Make greater use of social media to share key messages from the Presidential Address and discussions at Synod
- Create a dedicated page on the Diocesan website devoted to the work of Diocesan Synod. This page could include: accounts/articles on the work of Synod; guidance and advice to members and others about how Synod operates and how decisions are made; a recorded copy of the induction presentations; the FAQ sheet on the Diocesan Synod; the agendas, Presidential addresses, Books of Reports, and presentations made at Diocesan Synod; and the summaries of outcomes referred to above.

Recommendation 9

Improve access to, and practical arrangements at, meetings of Synod

The Review Group recommends that the Archbishop and Honorary Secretaries should:

- Consider the possibility of making a trial adjustment to the day on which Synod is held:
 - Consider holding at least one of the Synod meetings in the incoming triennium on a Saturday (10.00-16.30), possibly at the first meeting of the triennium when additional time is required for elections
 - Alert secretaries of select vestries to this experimental change in the timing of Synod meetings prior to Easter 2026, so that potential members of Synod 2026 will be aware of the revised arrangements at the time of their election
 - Survey Synod members following the Synod meetings in 2026 or 2027 to gauge the success or otherwise of the experiment¹¹
- Commission, perhaps as part of a post-Synod survey, more detailed research into the views of Synod members who do not attend Synod meetings, and reflect on this information when planning further meetings of Synod.

¹¹ These recommendations about holding Synod on a Saturday emerged in the work of the Review Group in late February and early March 2026. We brought them to the attention of Archbishop Jackson and the Honorary Secretaries at that time. The Review Group notes that they were considered and accepted by the Archbishop and the Honorary Secretaries and a decision taken in early March 2026 to implement them for Synod 2026. The change of date for Synod 2026 (which is scheduled to be held on 17 October 2026) was notified to select vestries and incumbents on 9 March 2026.

Recommendations

The Review Group recommends that the Diocesan Synod Organising Group should:

- Rotate the venue for Synod between the Dioceses of Dublin and Glendalough, and between the north and south of Dublin when held in that diocese
- Select Synod venues that are accessible by public transport
- Ensure that the meeting hall and all parts of the venue are fully accessible for disabled members of Synod
- Make sure that the meeting hall is fully equipped for the use of information and communication technology and that free wifi is available in the meeting hall and all breakout rooms
- Arrange the meeting hall to promote maximum participation; this could include: using round tables or horse-shoe seating layouts instead of theatre-style rows, limiting the number of officers at the top table, reducing the distance between the top table and Synod members in the hall, and using roving microphones to enable members to contribute to discussions from their seats
- Provide suitable quiet rooms or other spaces for breakout sessions
- Allow adequate space for stall holders and general circulation areas to encourage and facilitate social engagement among members and comfortable, purposeful interaction with stall holders
- Provide coffee/tea to members on arrival and/or in advance of the service of Holy Communion
- Encourage parishes to subsidise the cost of the main meal for their parish representatives.

Recommendation 10

Invite ecumenical guests to participate in Synod and take steps to encourage greater youth engagement

Ecumenical guests

The Review Group believes that the work of Synod would be strengthened by engagement with members of other Christian churches and other faith communities. The Group recommends that:

- Synod should invite guest representatives from other Christian denominations and other faith communities to attend Synod
- These guests should be encouraged to participate fully in discussions but should not have voting rights. Synod should consider altering its Standing Orders to make provision for this change, if necessary
- From time to time, guests from other faith communities should be invited to share the experience that their communities have had of synods and other similar meetings with the members of the Diocesan Synod. In particular, it would be valuable to learn about how these communities foster listening, discernment and informed decision-making in such settings.

Youth engagement

The Review Group is of the view that calls for younger people to be involved in Synod are well meant but that there are no easy solutions to the underlying challenge that these calls point to. Synod membership reflects the membership of engaged Church members, and as one interviewee commented to this Review: “Until you get good participation [of this age-group] at local level you can’t expect them to participate in higher structures like Synod.”

The Review Group believes that the challenge of how best to encourage greater engagement of young people in the life of the Church and in church bodies goes well beyond the remit of the Group. Nevertheless, the Review Group believes that as Synod evolves and improves the way it works, it should seek to complement and support wider efforts to grow faith among young people. The Review Group recommends that the following should be considered as the work and nature of Synod evolve:

- Synod members need to recognise that discussions about involving younger people in the life of the Church must recognise the diverse strengths, capacities and needs among these potential members: for example, the capacities and needs of children and teenagers, young adults, and adults in their 20s and 30s are vastly different, and the Church needs to consider how these different capacities and needs may be used and met within the faith community of the Church.
- When agenda items for meetings of Synod are being identified by the Diocesan Synod Organising Team, the experiences of young people, the opportunities that they embrace and the challenges that they face should be included. This would help all Synod members to have regular opportunities to understand better the lives of young people. Examples of initiatives where church communities successfully provide an attractive, nurturing and supportive faith-based environment for young people should be shared and disseminated through Synod. The Diocesan Synod Organising Team should collaborate closely with the Diocesan Youth Ministry Development Officer when advancing this recommendation.
- When the experience of young people is to be discussed, and when news of successful initiatives is shared, then young people need to be involved in leading such sessions in a meaningful way. Synod needs to recognise that simply having young people attend Synod (or other church-related meetings) is not sufficient. If young people are to participate in discussions or meetings such as Synod, then they need to be supported and enabled to engage meaningfully; they will need to be facilitated to form and express their views. Most of all, they will need to feel listened to, and they will want to feel that their views have had an impact. For teenagers and young adults, this will require preparation and encouragement, which will have to be deliberately and skilfully planned and delivered. The *Lundy Model of Child Participation*, developed by Professor Laura Lundy of Queen’s University Belfast and widely adopted by national and international organisations, agencies and governments, has prompted a sea-change in our understanding of how the perspective of young people may be incorporated into planning, discussions and policy making.¹² This model would have much to offer to the Church as it seeks to engage with young people.

¹² See for example: [Enabling the meaningful participation of children and young people globally: The Lundy Model | Research | Queen's University Belfast](#) ; [The-Lundy-model-of-child-participation.pdf](#) .

Recommendations

- As an immediate but limited first step to encourage greater participation of young people, Synod should consider the possibility of inviting parishes/cures to ensure, if possible, that at least one of their elected representatives is younger than 45 years old; alternatively, Synod could consider the possibility of inviting parishes/cures to invite one guest younger than 45 years of age to accompany their parish's/cure's representatives at Synod.

Changes to the size of Synod and fixed-term membership are not recommended at this time

The Review Group does not recommend any changes to the overall size of Synod nor the introduction of fixed-term membership. However, it recognises that Synod may wish to re-visit these issues in the future.

Recommendation 11

Provide adequate resourcing to enable improvements to be made

The Review Group recognises that implementation of the above recommendations will require additional resources. The need for these resources will arise mainly from the costs associated with improved communications before and after meetings of Synod (including significant improvements to the *Book of Reports*), the provision of better facilities during meetings of Synod (for example, better IT provision, provision of breakout rooms) and some additional part-time human resources to support the work of the Diocesan Synod Organising Group during the preparations for, and meetings of, Synod.

The Review Group recommends that Diocesan Council and its Glebes, Property and Finance Sub-Committee make provision for this additional expenditure within the budgetary processes.

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- Ms Elizabeth Keyes, Diocesan Secretary, United Dioceses of Cashel, Ferns and Ossory
- Ms Karen Seaman, Diocesan Secretary, United Dioceses of Meath and Kildare
- Ms Lorna Sharpe, Diocesan Secretary, United Dioceses of Tuam, Limerick and Killaloe

Those who agreed to be interviewed for the Review:

- The Revd Robert Clements, Chair, Mission Sub-Committee of Diocesan Councils
- Ms Emma Fawcett, Diocesan Youth Ministry Development Officer
- Ms Lynn Glanville, Diocesan Communications Officer
- Ms Ruth Gyves, Lay Honorary Secretary, Dublin
- The Revd Canon Suzanne Harris, Clerical Honorary Secretary, Glendalough
- Ms Sylvia Heggie, former Diocesan Secretary
- The Most Revd Dr Michael Jackson, Archbishop of Dublin and Bishop of Glendalough
- Mr Derek Neilson, Lay Honorary Secretary, Glendalough
- Mr Ian Walshe, Diocesan Secretary

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- Ms Ruth Burleigh, Secretary to the Archbishop of Dublin
- Ms Krupali Shah, Accounts and Administrative Officer, Diocesan Office
- Mr Ian Walshe, Diocesan Secretary

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- Ms Ruth Gyves, Lay Honorary Secretary, Dublin
- The Revd Canon Suzanne Harris, Clerical Honorary Secretary, Glendalough
- The Most Revd Dr Michael Jackson, Archbishop of Dublin and Bishop of Glendalough
- The Revd Professor Canon Anne Lodge, Dublin City University
- Mr Lyndon MacCann, Chair, Audit and Risk Sub-Committee of Diocesan Councils
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- The Revd David White, Clerical Honorary Secretary, Dublin.

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The members of the Diocesan Synod Review Group were:

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The Revd Canon Gillian Wharton

In attendance: Ian Walshe, Diocesan Secretary

