

PIONEER MINISTRY COUNCIL - REPORT 2026

Membership

Rt Rev David McClay (Chair)
Mrs Hilda Connolly
Rev Canon Dr Maurice Elliott
Rev Captain Isaac Hanna
Mr Joe Kelly
Mr Robert Neill (resigned as RB member, continuing as co-opted member)
Ms Stella Obe (resigned)
Mr Alan Williamson
Mr Henry Algeo
Mr Ian Horner
Mrs Rosemary Brown

In attendance – Pioneer Ministry Leadership Team

Rev Robert Jones – National Director
Ven Barry Forde – Operations Lead
Miss Abby Garner – Administration and PA
(Rev Canon Phil Potter – Consultant and Lead Accompanier -not in attendance)

Introduction

Pioneer Ministry continues to grow under the Terms of Reference and Development Plan agreed in 2022 and since formal launch in February 2023. With new pioneers coming forward for training each year, parishes and dioceses developing pioneer projects, diocesan hubs and advocates developing ways of contextualizing pioneer ministry in local contexts, we are excited about what God has been doing and look forward to all that He is leading us into. We are grateful for the opportunity to address how best to safeguard, nurture, grow and adapt to that which is new and about which we are still learning, as well as issues pertaining to medium and longer-term sustainability, scalability and leadership. During 2026 the Pioneer Leadership Team (PLT) will be reviewing the journey so far with a view to bringing forward strategic plans and proposals to enable pioneer ministry to continue to grow and flourish.

Through the development and planning phase in 2022, the formal launch and appointment of Pioneer Ministry, the PLT, and the Pioneer Ministry Council (PMC) in 2023 and the subsequent work of growing Pioneer Ministry, we have been working to five core objectives:

1. Establishing and embedding governance and leadership structures.
2. Integration of pioneer into culture and structures of the church so that it is recognised, resourced and funded.
3. Create and develop Pioneer Ministry Hubs in every diocese.
4. Identify, train, deploy and support volunteer and employed pioneers.
5. Establish and support new pioneer communities and churches.

This report will summarise the progress in each of these areas alongside making observations on the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

1. Governance and Leadership

The PMC and the PLT form the core of the ministry's governance structure. The Leadership Team — comprised of Rev Rob Jones and Ven Barry Forde, supported by Miss Abby Garner and consultant Rev Canon Phil Potter—reports to the Council, Representative Body, and the House of Bishops. The Council wishes to express its gratitude to Mrs Ingrid Brennan for her tenure on the Leadership Team, and to welcome Abby who has taken on this mantle.

The Council has overseen the cycles of pioneer selection, deployment, and training in both 2024 and 2025, and will have completed this task for 2026 applications by the time Synod meets. The Council continues to observe the need for adaptation in accommodating a wide range of needs among applicants. These included both new full-time pioneers and existing volunteers seeking training support.

Changes in Council membership are also noted: the Council expresses thanks to Mr Robert Neill who has served on the Council as the RB appointee and are delighted that he will continue to serve as a co-opted member. Further, we are thankful to Mrs Stella Obe for her contribution to the work of the PMC. We welcome Mr Henry Algeo, Mrs Rosemary Brown, and Rev Ian Horner as new members.

The Council wishes to express its gratitude to the parish of Holy Trinity Rathmines, Dublin, and the Diocese of Connor, for the secondments of Rev Rob Jones and Ven Barry Forde into the Leadership Team. In particular, Council is indebted to the parish of Holy Trinity and its Select Vestry in enabling much of the daily administration of the leadership team to take effect. Emerging out of, and being connected to, a local community of faith that has grown within a historic parish as a new congregation and expression of church, is a constant witness to how pioneer ministry might serve the whole Church of Ireland, ancient and new. We recognise the blessing of having a leadership team rooted in context, both in Dublin and Belfast, and seek to grow this across the Island. We are also, however, mindful of not presuming too much upon a single parish to facilitate the administration of pioneer ministry and recognise the need to explore a structure for leadership and operations that can run finances, perhaps employ new staff, and be shaped to fit a leadership team beyond the current secondments. This exploration will form part of our internal review in 2026.

The leadership team wishes to express its appreciation for the support of the staff at the RB for their guidance and assistance, and further to the House of Bishops for continuing to engage with pioneer ministry and help shape its future.

2. Diocesan Pioneer Ministry Hubs

Pioneer Ministry Hubs, or teams, are groups of people within each diocese who will work to advocate, champion and support pioneer ministry in their own setting. It is vital that pioneer ministry is contextualized and shaped to fit our diverse contexts. To date 14 Hubs have been established (see map below) at different stages of development across the Island. Each diocese is supported by a Pioneer Ministry Advocate who serves as the primary liaison for pioneering efforts. Throughout the year the leadership team engages with hubs and advocates across the island, and in June we met at CITI for a time of update, sharing, envisioning, and encouragement.

In November 2025 we hosted our second National Gathering in Mullingar. The first of two days was a time for the advocates to gather, building on a similar time set aside in 2024. It was a blessing and encouragement to listen to how progress has been, and is being, made in each hub and diocese. This time also provides an opportunity for advocates to share ideas with one another.

On day two we were joined by 132 people from across the whole church – clergy, lay, bishops, representatives from Standing Committee and the RB. We heard from our Pioneer Ministers, had time for discussion around tables, listened to presentations by the leadership team and were led throughout by the wisdom and insights of our keynote speaker, Rev Dr Michael Moynagh. With attendees from all 4 corners of the island, Michael provided great encouragement and practical ideas of how we might reach those with little or no connection to church. Michael drew on material from his ‘Godsend’ book, a resource that is being utilised by weekly online gatherings throughout Lent 2026, facilitated by the leadership team, which attendees signed up from across the Church of Ireland

Council is delighted to report that Dr Joanne Miller, Derry and Raphoe, will be providing additional support one day per week as a member of the PLT to promote the work each Pioneer Advocate and across all the Pioneer Hubs.

3. Identify, Train, Deploy and Support Volunteer and Employed Pioneers

2024 and 2025 marked a significant operational milestone: the Church of Ireland's first and second intakes of pioneers-in-training. In total, 14 new licensed pioneers have begun their training in September 2024 and 2025 through a new tailored course delivered in partnership with the Church of Ireland Theological Institute and Church Army. New licensing services have been developed with Diocesan Bishops, reflecting the local character and context of each ministry. This early success reflects an encouraging appetite for pioneering across a range of settings. We are currently working with the Liturgical Advisory Committee on further developing the licensing services and also on other Pioneer Ministry related liturgical ideas Through Hubs and Advocates, with the introduction of Godsend, and the availability of other resources including those developed by Church Army. It is our hope to see pioneer permeate right down to local parish level, as interested volunteers and congregations engage with reaching those with little or no connection to church.

4. Establish and support new pioneer communities and churches

Closely related to the identification and deployment of new Pioneers are the ministries they will be deployed into. The newly deployed pioneers have been placed in a diverse array of innovative contexts. Projects receiving full funding from the Representative Body include:

Diocese	Ministry Type	Pioneer and starting year
Meath & Kildare	Pilgrimage and Spiritual tourism	Rev Philip McKinley - 2025
Connor	Church Plant	Rev Peter Meenagh - 2024
	Pioneer Nursing and wellbeing	Mrs Naomi Jennings 2025
	Parish network ecclesial community	Mr Jonny Diamond - 2025
Tuam, Limerick & Killaloe	Pilgrimage and Spiritual tourism	Mr Valerie Raitt - 2024
D&D	Parish Renewal Project	Mrs Lorraine / Mr Nevin Anderson, 2024
	Church Plant	Miss Natalie Trainor - 2024
Dublin & Glendalough	New Pioneer Parish Congregation	Mr Shane McGuire - 2024
	New Pioneer Parish Congregation	Mr Aaron Halliwell 2025

In addition, training-only support is provided to four Pioneer Ministers:

Diocese	Ministry Type	Pioneer
C, F, O	Pioneer Congregation & Cathedral Partnership	Mr Ross Barrett - 2024
C, C, R	Carraig Centre Pioneer Project	Ms Louise Hockey - 2024
D & D	Suitcase Project immigrants / new communities	Mr Tim Burns - 2024
	Titanic Quarter Outreach	Mr Andrew McCaw -2025

These projects reflect the diversity of the pioneer vision: from urban mission centres to rural pilgrimage-based communities, and from refugee outreach to revitalising traditional parishes. Videos and stories of each pioneer and their ministry are now available online, helping to promote awareness and inspire others to consider pioneering in their own contexts. As stated above, it is hoped that locally led, volunteer-driven pioneer initiatives will emerge through the diocesan hubs, extending the reach of Pioneer Ministry well beyond those receiving central support.

We recognise, and welcome, the challenges and opportunities presented by the formation of new communities – liturgical, homiletical, sacramental. We are greatly encouraged by our pioneers who value the need for all of these and who seek to grow communities through worship, word and sacrament. This a sign of seeking to grow deeper, of valuing the means of grace the Lord has provided in growing His church. Through wisdom and engagement within the local parishes and dioceses that are bringing forward pioneer ministry proposals, we are seeking to find ways that honour our valued customs and practices and reimagining how these might best serve reaching those with little or no connection to our customs and practices.

2026 proposals

At the time of preparation of this report the Pioneer Ministry Leadership Team and Council are working on 8 applications for Pioneer Ministry Projects and Pioneers for 2026. We are delighted that there is very strong interest in bringing forward new applications, including from within new dioceses that do not have a funded pioneer deployed within them. see map below)

For information the grant available, payable over 5 years, for ministries commencing in 2025 (with the expectation that applicants will provide the additional funding required to support a full-time pioneer in his or her ministry) is €122,0041 / £106,090 with a further allowance towards housing and expenses of €19,150 / £16,278(payable over 5 years).

5. Integration of Pioneer Ministry into the culture and structures of the Church of Ireland

Since its formal launch in February 2023, Pioneer Ministry has progressed from concept to action:

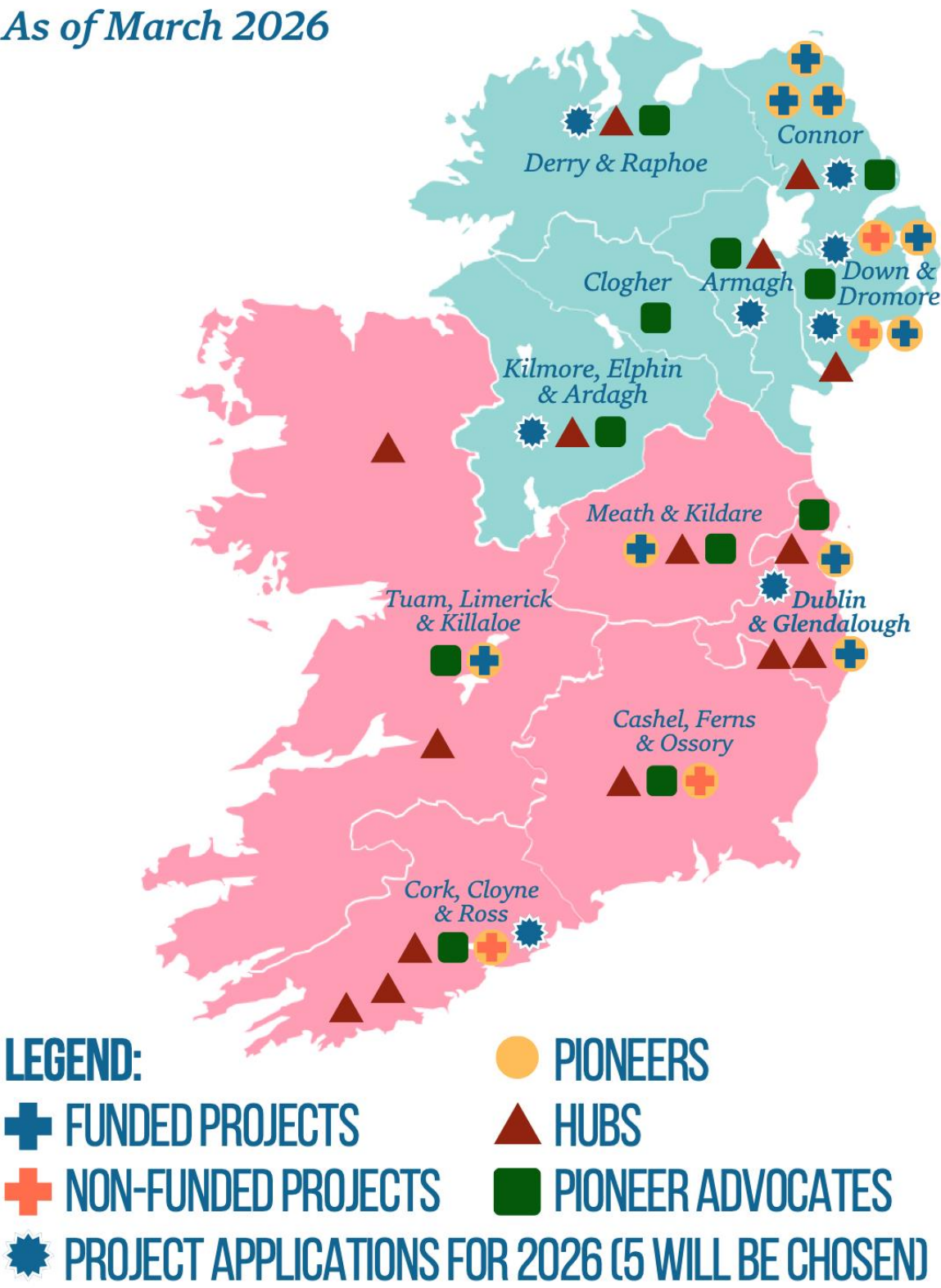
- Endorsed by the House of Bishops;
- Funded by the Representative Body;
- Governed by the General Synod - established Council;
- Supported by trained diocesan Advocates and Hubs;
- Integrated into theological education through a bespoke course;
- Supporting 9 new funded ministries and a further 4 in funded pioneer training.

This reflects not only strong institutional support but a growing recognition across the Church of the need for missional innovation.

Below is a map highlighting progress to date of Pioneer Ministry across the island.

PIONEER MINISTRY PROGRESS

As of March 2026



Summary

This iteration of Pioneer Ministry is still in its early stages, but it is already proving to be a promising and essential initiative for the future of the Church of Ireland. It is helping to build bridges with those previously out of reach, while also sparking energy and creativity within existing church structures.

With the continued partnership of bishops, dioceses, the Representative Body and theological educators, this movement offers a way forward for mission in an increasingly post-Christian Ireland. Members of the General Synod are warmly encouraged to:

- **Pray** for the pioneers, advocates, and hubs;
- **Promote** pioneer culture within their dioceses;
- **Engage** with the Pioneer Ministry Team for training and development opportunities.

The internal review in 2026 will be important in shaping our next steps; leadership, finances, training, Hubs, Advocates, and more. The Council and leadership team are grateful to all those working in step with us. We express our gratitude to the House of Bishops, Representative Body, General Synod and Standing Committee, the Church of Ireland Theological Institute and Church Army, along with our hopes and prayers for the Pioneers, Diocesan Advocates and Hubs. This is an ongoing journey of learning and discovery as, working together, we seek to help the whole church to reach those with little or no connection to church.

To pick up a guidebook, sign up to our newsletter, or to find out more, please go to our website, www.pioneerministry.org along with visiting the Pioneer Ministry stand at General Synod.