



A Future with Hope

**STRATEGIC PLAN
2022 – 2027**

AMRI


ASSOCIATION OF
LEADERS OF MISSIONARIES
& RELIGIOUS OF IRELAND

A Future with Hope

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‘For surely I know the plans I have for you,
says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not
for harm, to give you a future with hope.’

JEREMIAH 29:11







PRESIDENT'S FOREWORD

On behalf of the AMRI Executive Council, I am pleased to present this new strategic plan for the work of AMRI. Over the past 18 months, we have engaged in an extensive consultation with AMRI members, committees and staff, in preparation for this new strategy.

It was an exercise of discernment as we listened to the concerns, hopes and dreams for the future of religious and missionary life in Ireland, and we hope, in the midst of it all, that the Holy Spirit is present, continuing to guide us. This plan: A Future with Hope is the result of these consultations.

Our members are at the core of all that we do. As religious and missionaries, we have battled with Covid and we will continue to face other major challenges in the next five years, with our ageing demographic. These challenges afford us opportunities to explore new ways

of being and doing in the service of the kingdom of God. It is important that we face these challenges and opportunities together in solidarity, for 'If one member is suffering, all the members share its suffering. And if one member is honoured, all the members share its joy!' (1 Corinthians 12:26)

This strategic plan positions AMRI to increase supports and services offered to members: having a strong outward focus of service to those on the margins of our society and promoting an integral ecology.

Your commitment and support over the next five years is critical to us as we continue to develop AMRI as an association for your benefit, for the Church and for society.

Brendan Coffey OSB
Abbot of Glenstal
President of AMRI

SECRETARY GENERAL'S INTRODUCTION



AMRI's vision, inspired by the good news of Jesus, is to contribute to the creative living of religious and missionary life in a synodal Church, responding with hope to the signs of the times, to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor.

Spirituality, social justice and sustainable living are the hallmarks of our association. Being present in the divine mystery and taking action from this place of prayer can transform ourselves and our world. We try to witness to Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God, to live in a time of love and liberation despite the darkness and difficulties in our world. We dare to hope that all can be well and commit to making this dream a reality.

AMRI is an association of leaders, keepers of the vision, people entrusted to embody the values and all that is best about our congregations, orders and organisations. A particular feature of this plan, **A Future with Hope**, is to nurture

and provide opportunities for leaders to develop and deepen our understanding of ministry as servant leadership in the context of a synodal Church.

This plan presents five priorities for the future development of AMRI: leadership support and development; promoting justice, peace and integrity of creation; supporting the emergence of a synodal Church; increasing services to our members, and strengthening AMRI as a network organisation.

Pursuing these aims, we believe will help us to navigate the major changes facing our members as we learn to walk the path of synodality to a future that beckons us in hope.

Please take the time to study our new strategy and, as always, we would welcome your feedback and engagement.

David Rose
Secretary General





THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This plan sets the direction for the work and development of AMRI for the next five years. It is the result of a review of the previous plan and extensive consultations with AMRI members, committees and staff, who shared their hopes, dreams and concerns about the future of religious and missionary life in Ireland. It was an exercise in discernment, seeking the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, rooted in faith in Jesus, as a call to grow and evolve in response to the signs of the times.

The strategic intent of the plan is to promote a creative living of religious and missionary life in Church and society; to advocate for social and environmental justice, and to enhance AMRI's capacity as a leadership, representative and support organisation serving the members of AMRI through greater collaboration.

The plan builds on existing work, some of which has developed and evolved over many years, for example the Religious Formation Ministry Programme celebrates its 40th anniversary this year. The plan seeks to enhance and deepen existing work and introduces a range of new initiatives always in the service of our members in the context of a synodal Church.

The plan tries to balance the inner organisational needs of the AMRI members with an outward focus on service to those who experience exclusion and poverty; and to protect our common home from global warming. AMRI as a representative and network organisation adds value through shared approaches and collaboration. It is in these in-between spaces that a new energy for religious and missionary life can emerge.

ABOUT AMRI

AMRI is the representative and support organisation for the leaders of the 155 Catholic religious institutes, societies of apostolic life and missionary organisations. Our membership is diverse, from small communities to global missionary congregations, from enclosed contemplatives to active lay missionaries. Respecting the independence and autonomy of each member, our purpose is to support and offer leadership to our members so that they can be effective and collaborative leaders in the service of the communities they lead, in a time of profound change in the Church and society.





OUR VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

Vision

AMRI's vision, inspired by the good news of Jesus, is a creative and compassionate living of religious and missionary life in a synodal Church, responding with hope to the signs of the times, to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor.

Mission

As a representative association, AMRI's mission is to provide leadership and support to our members, to foster collaboration among our members, and to promote spirituality, social justice and sustainable living on a shared journey of faith.

What We Believe – Our Values

As a faith-based organisation, we believe in the Holy Spirit, alive and active in our communities and in the world, inspiring and energising us to seek God through prayer and in living the Christian life in community.

We believe that living religious and missionary life is important for our society and Church, pointing to transcendent values, inviting to a deeper meaningful way of life, lived in community and in prayer and witnessing to a spirit of service.

We believe in the good news of Jesus, a message of love and liberation from oppression, so we seek to work for peace and the transformation of unjust systems.

We believe in being missionary, to proclaim the good news of liberation through words and actions that build up and respect people of all faiths and cultures.

We believe in being present with people who are on the margins, to listen, to learn and to be of service in reflecting and upholding the dignity of the human person.

We believe in creation as God's gift to humanity, so we seek to care and protect our endangered planet by living simply and sustainably.

How we work

AMRI's way of working is collegial, collaborative and inclusive. We provide opportunities for our members to come together, to address common issues, believing the whole association is more than the sum of its parts. We are adopting a synodal approach in that we are walking together, listening to each other, consulting and seeking the wisdom of our combined membership as we discern paths to a future with hope. Our executive council has equal female - male representation.

External Environment

This section describes the context in which we live and work.

War has returned to Europe. We see the devastation of the daily bombings and killings in Ukraine. In Ireland, many religious congregations have responded by offering

accommodation and a range of supports in welcoming refugees. The war has far-reaching consequences in Europe with energy supplies, price rises and globally with food shortages.

Covid has severely impacted many of our religious communities who have older and vulnerable members. It seems likely it will remain a threat as it continues to come in waves. The development of vaccines has mitigated the worst effects and lowered mortality rates. AMRI continues to advocate for access to vaccines for all in the global south, where the vaccination rate is 22%.

Being missionary, we have a global perspective with Irish missionaries present on all continents and congregations becoming more multi-cultural. We see clearly that we live in an unequal world. It is a world where the richest 1 percent of the population owns 82 percent of the world's wealth (Oxfam). During the Covid-19 pandemic such wealth intensified at unprecedented rates, while nearly 6 million people lost their lives to the virus and many more suffered devastating

health and livelihood consequences. Millions more were plunged further into poverty as the wealth inequality gap deepened.

This global scene is represented in Ireland too, where the growing inequality gap finds the majority of wealth held by the top 20 percent of the population. In fact, the wealth of Ireland's nine billionaires increased by 58 percent since the start of the pandemic. Inflation is increasing. We have a housing and homeless crisis. Religious congregations over the past 25 years have donated property and supported the development of social housing associations, in fact most of the major social housing agencies can trace their origin to a religious founder.

Our planet, our 'common home,' has been plundered at an alarming rate to satisfy this appetite for wealth accumulation. The cataclysmic impact of the sustained devastation of our planet of its natural resources, has resulted in potentially irreversible climate

change as our planet gets warmer, speeding up the loss to biodiversity and exacerbating ocean acidification. This advances the loss to habitats, extinction of species and a threat to our very existence. Religious continue to advocate for sustainable policies and practices, and model sustainable living through a range of ecological retreat centres, and the witness of living simply.

Despite a society that is becoming ever more secular and resistant to Gospel teaching and values, there is hope and opportunity. Pope Francis challenges us 'to move forward in a bold cultural revolution' [*Laudato Si'*, 114]. He tasks us to 'create a different culture' [*Fratelli Tutti*, 57], one that is 'capable of transcending our differences and divisions', where we can resolve our conflicts and learn to care for one another. He reminds us to think and act as a 'single family dwelling in a common home', to dare to 'dream' for a more just, equal and sustainable world.



Internal Environment

This section describes some of the challenges and opportunities being faced by religious and missionaries in Ireland today.

Religious and missionary life is in a state of profound change in Ireland. We are aware of our fragility and weaknesses. We are an ageing community and with many, though not all, members experiencing a decline in vocations. Aging can bring a wisdom and the possibility of entering a new phase of life more centred on being than doing, with gratitude for the gifts received over a lifetime and a drawing closer to the divine presence. The average age of many of our congregations is 75 years.

Caring for older members is an increasing priority; new structures for governance, care, and support will need to be developed.

A small number of young people continue to live the call to religious life, attracted by prayer life in community and the opportunity to serve in creative ways in ministry. These vocations need to be nourished and space allowed for new younger members to flourish.

The past 25 years have seen religious withdraw from education and healthcare and transfer the governance of these services to new lay trustee bodies. This letting go has often been a liberation; freeing people and resources to serve where the need is greatest.



There has been a remarkable flourishing of new initiatives and innovative ministries in this period: in social and community work, social finance, community education, online learning, work with prisoners and refugees, Travellers, counselling, pastoral work, spirituality and caring for the environment. There has been social justice policy and advocacy work offering an analysis from equality and human rights perspective. The missionary model of development with longterm presence in poor communities overseas is recognised and valued locally and globally.

These successes of recent years have been achieved in partnership with laypeople who attracted by the vision, values and spirituality of religious want to share in mission and ministry, as expression of baptism. The participation of laypeople as partners in mission needs to be further developed.

And yet there is a shadow side to religious life that cannot be ignored, but must continue to be claimed and owned. The sexual and spiritual abuses and cover up that happened within our institutions caused devastating

harm to those entrusted to our care, and for which we are profoundly sorry. We continue to ask forgiveness; we need to listen carefully to survivors and value what they say. We invest in healing services and in safeguarding to ensure these crimes do not happen again. These appalling events prompt us to re-evaluate models of Church that allowed the abuse of power and false images of God to prevail.

Synodality offers hope for a more inclusive Church where all, especially survivors, are listened to. It means walking with people on a journey to the future and encountering people we may not usually engage with, along the way. Dialogue and respectful listening allow a new way of being Church to emerge. The equality of all the baptized is the basis of the synodal pathway. The role of women in the Church demands urgent attention. The AMRI sponsored dialogue between women religious and bishops is an important step along the way. The equality of women and men needs to be modelled in governance, and in the leadership of mission and ministry in the Church.

STRATEGIC AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The five aims with objectives are outlined. It is envisioned that lead implementation groups and individuals will be allocated the objectives, who will develop operational plans.

LEADERSHIP

1. Provide Leadership Development and Governance Support

This aim calls for AMRI to: focus on governance and leadership development, support and training for leadership teams; continue the Religious Formation Ministry Programme and develop a new model of shared governance.

- a. Continue to provide and develop the Religious Formation Ministry Programme (RFMP), as a missionary outreach to the Church in the Global South
- b. Facilitate opportunities for leadership development and training for AMRI members and their leadership teams

- c. Pilot a new model of shared governance for a number of AMRI members
- d. Develop a shared initial formation policy and programme
- e. Develop a network of young lay faith leaders – workers, associates and volunteers associated with AMRI members
- f. Contribute to leadership in the Church through collaboration with the Irish Bishops Conference

SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE

2. Work for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation

This aim responds to the challenge of Laudato Si', focusing on the interconnectedness of key social and ecological justice issues that impact communities who experience injustice and exclusion in Ireland and globally, as well as caring for our common home.

- a. Continue to advocate and educate to prevent human trafficking
- b. Be flexible and adaptable in advocating, communicating and collaborating on critical and emerging social and ecological justice issues and in supporting our members' initiatives
- c. Build a network of justice, peace & ecology collaborators and network with other like-minded organisations and agencies
- d. Support the Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network Ireland
- e. Contribute to facilitating a response to 'welcoming the stranger,' in particular refugees displaced by war and climate change

TOWARDS A SYNODAL CHURCH

3. Contribute to the re-visioning of a different Church through synodality: communion, participation and mission

Synodality is the context and content of this aim. AMRI will be a leader in shaping 'a different Church' (Pope Francis), through awareness raising on synodality, and by promoting a greater role for women in the Church, and promoting co-responsibility for laypeople.

- a. Be active participants in the Irish synodal pathway
- b. Promote a vision and culture of vocations to religious and missionary life
- c. Advance a more inclusive role for women in the Church, through dialogue with Church leaders.
- d. Provide opportunities to evolve new thinking on religious and missionary life
- e. Encourage opportunities to share the richness of members' spiritualities both apostolic and contemplative with lay co-workers and associates
- f. Promote and pilot a new model of lay leadership in the Church

COLLABORATION AND SERVICES

4. Develop AMRI as an collaborative organisation, a membership network and service provider for members

This aim concerns AMRI developing as a shared services hub to address common organisational needs that individual congregations may not be able to address on their own or that make sense to address in a collaborative manner.

- a. Develop a shared services support hub with the necessary resources for cross congregational issues such as: exploring a shared archives, minister of religion visas, mission awareness programme, research on missionaries, Garda vetting and other emerging issues.
- b. Facilitate opportunities for younger religious to meet and collaborate inter-congregationally
- c. Initiate an exploration of shared aged care and healthcare services.
- d. In collaboration with the IEC, maintain and deepen the culture of safeguarding and healing for survivors through support of the National Board for Safeguarding in the Catholic Church, Towards Healing and Towards Peace

- e. Review AMRI's role in Catholic Education to determine future involvement

STRENGTHENING AMRI

5. Strengthen the AMRI secretariat and committees to ensure delivery of this plan

This aim is about strengthening AMRI as an effective organisation and as a network through ensuring committees and staff are resourced, supported and developed.

- a. Put in place a communications strategy internally and externally to help deliver on this plan, strengthen the AMRI network and promote good news stories of religious and missionary life
- b. Ensure financial accountability, good stewardship and address the financial sustainability of AMRI
- c. Ensure good governance and compliance with all statutory reporting obligations
- d. Ensure the AMRI team and committees are adequately resourced to implement this plan.



Implementation

The aims and objectives build on the success of current work and introduce new initiatives in the service of the AMRI membership and the members of their congregations and societies. The Executive Council and Secretary General have oversight and overall responsibility to ensure implementation of the plan. Each objective will have a named implementation group or person who will further develop that objective into an implementation plan with manageable actions and indicators of progress. There will be an annual review. New initiatives call for the formation of new

groups and two new roles are envisaged for the successful implementation: A Leadership Development Coordinator and a Membership Engagement Coordinator. Collaboration between implementation groups is envisaged and essential for success.

What will have happened as a result of this strategy?

In five years' time, as a result of this plan, AMRI will have offered leadership, representation and provided a range of supports to AMRI members. It is envisaged that this will result in the following outcomes:



- AMRI will be seen as a valuable resource for our members, who will look to AMRI for vision, leadership and guidance on issues crucial to their own leadership. This will be achieved by listening carefully and providing a continuum of support and advice to our members across the aims of the plan: on leadership, synodality, justice, peace and integrity of creation and being agile in piloting new services that address the needs of our members.
- AMRI will be recognised as a credible voice on social and environmental justice among like-minded organisations and by the public, in particular it will educate on anti-trafficking and provide accommodation and supports for refugees.
- Through our accompanying communications plan, there will be an new appreciation of the value of religious and missionary life.
- There will be a richer and deeper understanding of what it means to be a synodal Church – inclusive of a range of voices, especially of women’s voices, and the voices of survivors.
- Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, and healing of survivors will remain core to the work of AMRI.
- Specifically, there will have been initiatives on:
 - » Influencing the emergence of a synodal Church
 - » A new model of shared governance
 - » Leadership development opportunities
 - » Exploration of shared supports for aging members to flourish
 - » Shared space for younger members to have their voice heard and to flourish
 - » Deepening of the culture of vocations
 - » A new initial formation policy
 - » Delivery and development of the Religious Formation Ministry programme
 - » The role of women in the Church
 - » A new appreciation of the vocation and mission of laypeople
 - » Promoting spiritualities of our members.



The logo for AMRI features the letters 'A', 'M', 'R', and 'I' in a serif font. The 'A' and 'I' are green, while the 'M' and 'R' are black. A vertical grey bar with a white circle at the top is positioned behind the letters.

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