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## **1) Introduction**

Eighty eight years ago the Sisters of the Cross and Passion moved in to Drumalis in Larne, initiating the ministry of the house which involves spiritual renewal, reconciliation and healing. This present consultation process was initiated by Sr Margaret Rose, Sr Anna and Maura Burns with a view to the future of the Retreat House and its ministry.

This report gathers together the messages from the consultation process in order to provide a resource that supports further discernment about the future.

## **2) Purpose of Consultation**

Drumalis is well used and loved by many different participants. The leadership team at Drumalis wanted those voices to be heard; hoping that it will be possible to harvest some of the goodwill, expertise and vision available within that body to help shape the future for Drumalis. This consultation process is about listening – and feeds into a discernment process for those with the responsibility to craft and decide upon the way ahead.

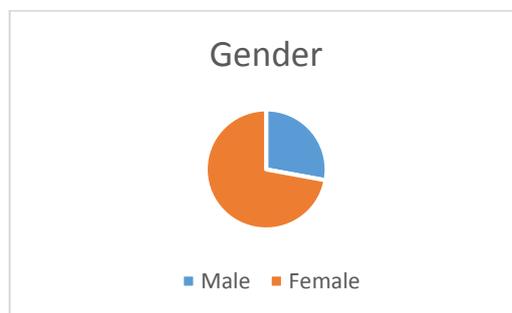
## **3) Methodology & Contributors**

Open invitations to participate in the consultation process were sent by Drumalis direct to past/present participants and via social media (Facebook). About 140 people attended the consultation events held in Drumalis, of which 130 completed individual feedback forms. Other people, who were not able to attend an event but still wanted to contribute, gave written or oral feedback direct to the leadership team; in addition, some participants at the consultation events subsequently made direct contact to add further thoughts (that direct feedback is not captured in this report).

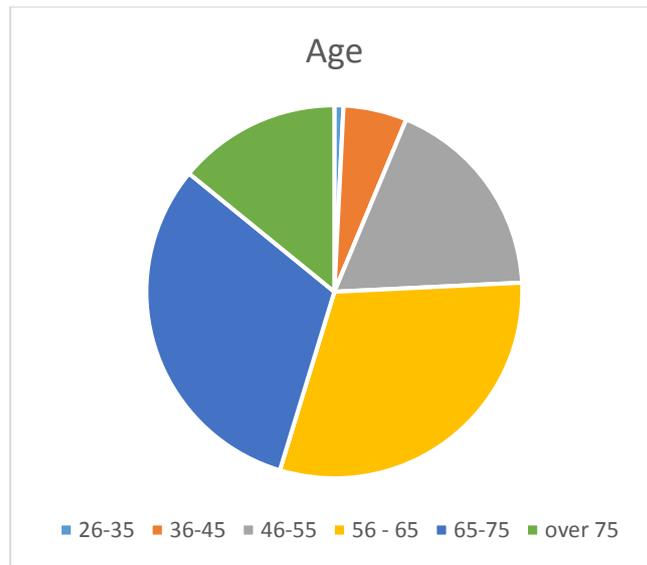
Three facilitated consultation events were held: Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> February 2018, 7.00pm – 9.00pm; Saturday, 17<sup>th</sup> February 2018, 5.30pm – 7.30pm; and Thursday, 15<sup>th</sup> March 2018, 2.00pm – 4.00pm. The dates and times were chosen to maximise the range of options for different potential contributors. The events were hosted by the leadership team, who opened and closed each event, and facilitated by Laurie Randall and Sean OBaoill.

Each of the three events followed the same pattern. After a welcome and moment for prayer, participants were told the purpose of the process – to walk together into the future – and encouraged to be candid in their reflections. The Vision Statement was displayed and participants were invited to use a voting preference system to indicate what aspects of the Vision they had personally most experienced and valued at Drumalis. Participants had an opportunity to share a few reflections on these experiences. People then moved into mixed sub-groups (randomised allocation) where they considered the Vision and discussed what should be happening at Drumalis in the future. They were also asked to consider how they might engage with those ideas themselves. The group findings were then presented in the full plenary. The meeting closed with an acknowledgement of the generosity of those who made the effort to come and participate in the consultation process, an indication of next steps, and a closing prayer. Participants were given the opportunity to sign up to be kept informed of the emerging discernments.

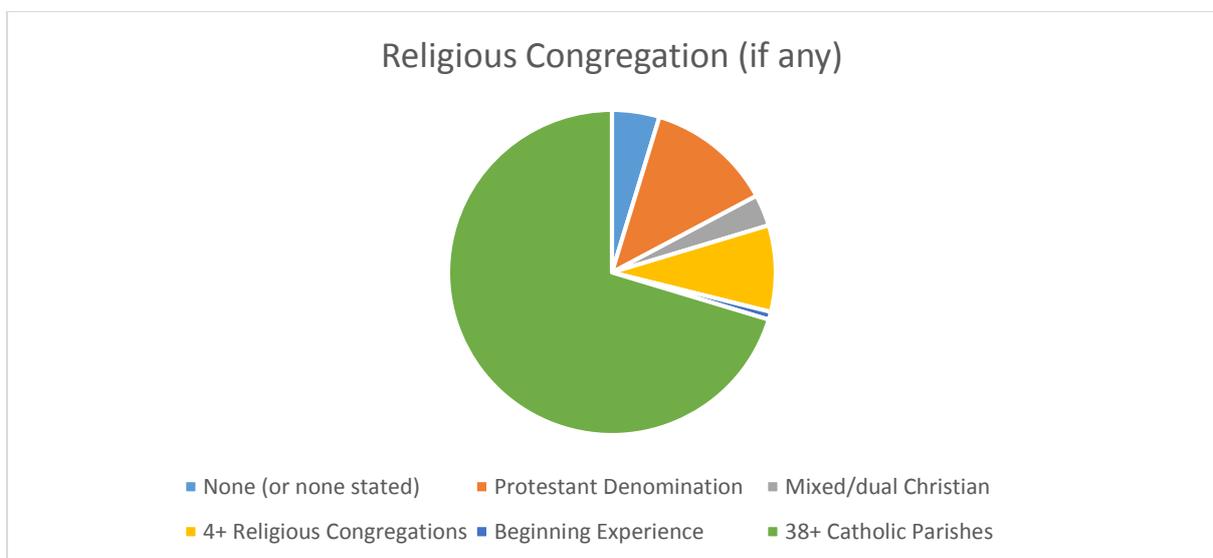
Over the three events, 72% of participants were female and 28% male.



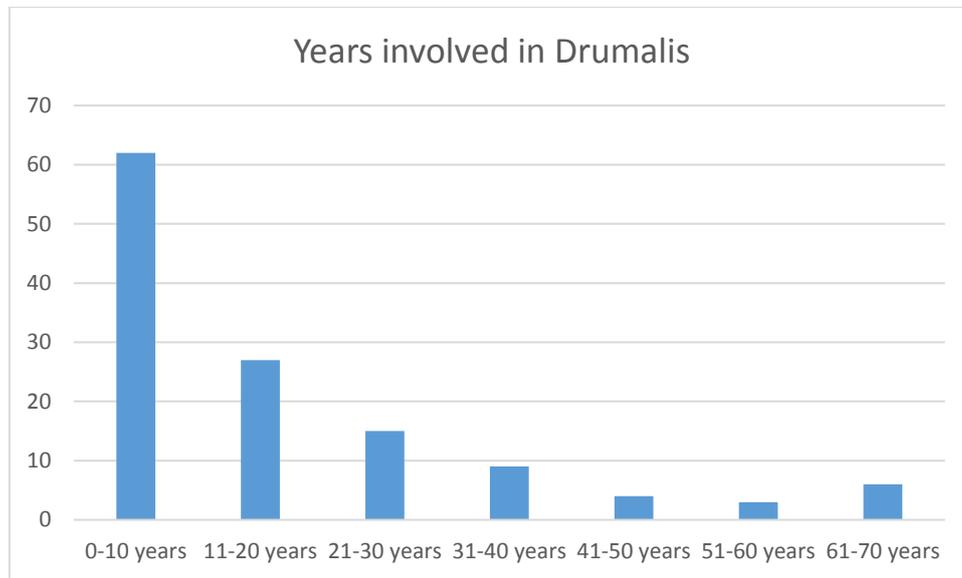
There was also a distinct age profile to the participants, with 75% being over the age of 56 years old, and only one person under 35 attending.



Respondents were also asked to indicate if they were connected to a religious grouping. Unsurprisingly, most participants were Catholic (about 80%), though these represented an impressive 38 Catholic parishes plus 4 different Orders (see appendix ii for list). That spread of parishes demonstrates a wide geographical pool, with many respondents travelling a considerable distance to access Drumalis and to participate in this consultation process. Those coming from other church backgrounds represented a mix including Presbyterian, Church of Ireland, Methodist, Christian Fellowship, English Anglican and mixed background. No respondents reported coming from a different religious faith. A small number indicated no religious connection (or chose not to complete that section).



Most respondents had come relatively recently to Drumalis, with about 30% having been involved for less than 5 years. However a significant number of respondents had been involved with Drumalis for much of their lives, suggesting a high degree of loyalty, with 30% involved for more than 20 years.

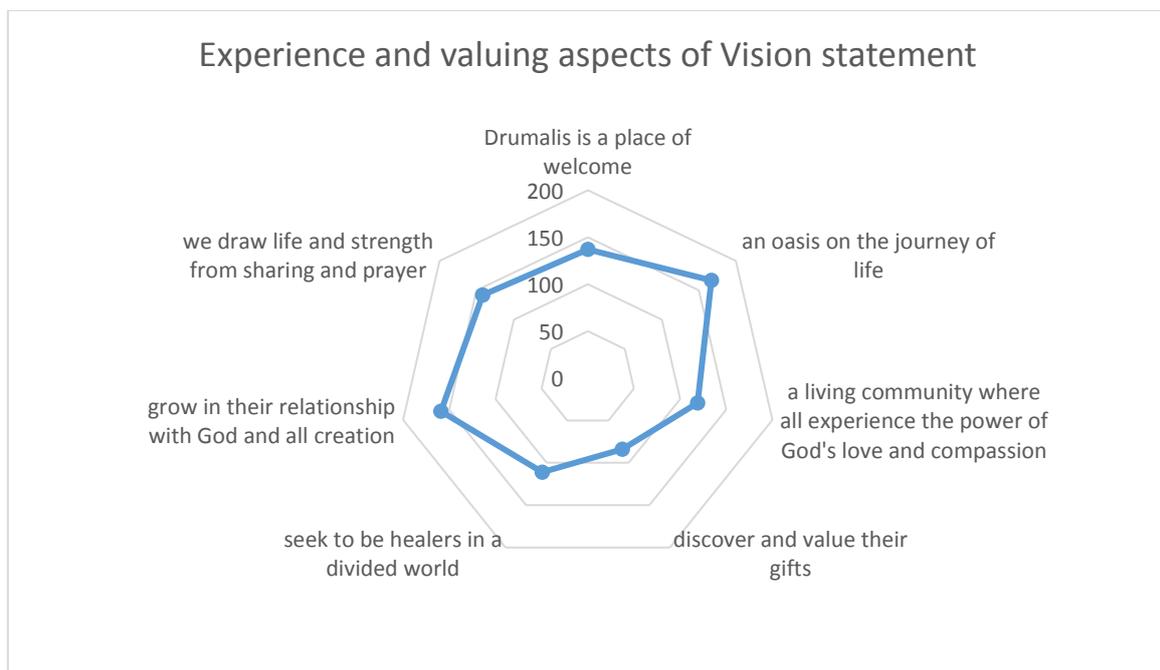


#### 4) Response to Current Vision

Participants were reminded of the Vision Statement of Drumalis:

***Drumalis is a place of welcome,  
an oasis on the journey of life.  
A living community where all  
Experience the power of God's love and compassion  
Discover and value their gifts  
Seek to be healers in a divided world  
Grow in their relationship with God and all creation  
We draw life and strength from sharing and prayer.***

This statement was dissected into seven portions. Each participant had seven stars and they were invited to graphically indicate what of this Vision they had most experienced and valued during their involvement with Drumalis. They had the freedom to place the stars evenly with one on each segment, or to vary the number they placed against a particular phrase in order to demonstrate the strength of the impact for them personally. This led to an interesting collective profile of appreciation for the Vision and the way it is experienced by those connecting with Drumalis.



Respondents reacted very warmly to the Vision Statement. Several people took the opportunity to describe what Drumalis has meant to them in relation to each of these different aspects of the Vision.

- “Drumalis is a place of welcome” – the deep welcome of Drumalis was described, and also the uniqueness of that.
- “an oasis on the journey of life” – people find their time at Drumalis to be restorative.
- “A living community where all experience the power of God's love and compassion” – the lived community aspect of Drumalis was named in addition to the awareness of God’s love.

- “Discover and value their gifts” – Drumalis has provided training and reflection space where people feel equipped and encouraged.
- “Seek to be healers in a divided world” – this contribution was recognised on social, political and religious levels, with an emphasis on the needs in our local situation.
- “Grow in their relationship with God and all creation” – this sense of stewardship encompassed the beauty of the garden in addition to environmental issues.
- “We draw life and strength from sharing and prayer” – the collective spirituality of Drumalis was described warmly.

## 5) Group Feedback

Many of the sub-group respondents named the importance of protecting and continuing with the present core programmes and vision. The contributions shared from the sub-groups have been collated into four broad themes: Accessibility of Drumalis; its Purpose; Who we want to reach; and the Character of Drumalis.

### i. Accessibility of Drumalis

#### - **Hosting Space** (14 comments)

Drumalis is seen as a very welcoming place that is safe, confidential and offers a place of healing. Some wondered if its use could be expanded beyond hosting religious events – being used as a creative or inspirational space for secular organisations, wedding receptions, and hosting people who might seek accommodation like British Open visitors. Other ideas that might expand the reach of Drumalis included a coffee shop, cinema evenings, exploring life issues as well as faith issues, open days, having monthly themes and poetry readings. One group suggested offering vouchers as gifts to encourage different people to come and experience the ‘Oasis’.

#### - **External Connection** (15 comments)

Respondents offered ideas for ways that Drumalis might publicise what it is offering: an Information Day; Programme of activities; Social media; Open Days; and better advertising

in the wider world/community. A couple of groups expressed the value of encouraging more local engagement with Drumalis. Some suggested that Drumalis might make a contribution electronically through the use of YouTube videos or other media to feed into the ethical debate in the Public Square or articulate a 'faith voice' on current issues, and critique messages that come from media. Groups also wanted to see Drumalis being used as a resource in Catechetical and faith development within the Catholic Church; and also reaching out to the Deportation Centre in Larne.

- **Cost of Access** (2 comments)

Two groups expressed the need to find ways to avoid cost acting as a barrier to engagement: suggesting that Drumalis explore offering bursaries, or have short courses that would cost less for the participants.

- ii. **Purpose**

- **Healing** (17 comments)

Many groups felt that Drumalis has a strong healing ministry that integrates body, mind and spirit. This was seen as particularly important for marginalised groups, the elderly, those facing dementia, domestic violence, bereavement, mental health challenges and suicide. Several groups mentioned the work needed with Carers. Drumalis was described as becoming a hub or Resource Centre that would continue to offer opportunities for care and healing in an increasingly fraught world.

- **Spiritual** (22 comments)

Respondents envisaged that Drumalis would continue to offer retreats and that feeling of an 'oasis' for renewal. The spiritual nature of that was seen to include meditation, contemplative centering prayer, alternative therapies, mindfulness, spa retreats and yoga. Some suggested that Drumalis might be a venue people could use when offering Spiritual Direction, and to promote future development of Spiritual Directors. Other aspects of this spiritual theme included support for spiritual growth, learning about faith and how to share that with others. This might include having a Reading group for shared exploration of topics such as Ignatian Spirituality. Drumalis is also seen as a place for prayer, for example a monthly prayer meeting and a suggestion that Drumalis might make a smaller space

available where small groups could come together for prayer (separate from the main centre).

- **Political/Social** (9 comments)

Respondents believed that Drumalis can make an important contribution in the political and social sphere by providing a safe space for engagement on difficult topics. There were specific suggestions about the support needed by people at Stormont or other leaders who needed a 'place apart' to engage together on issues of truth, understanding, ethics and justice. Drumalis was also seen as a place where cross-community workshops might be hosted or events supporting engagement for ethnic minorities. Respondents wanted to see the special atmosphere in Drumalis being used to help risky conversations happen and to expand connections between the secular world and theological perspectives.

- **Environment/Nature** (21 comments)

A lot of groups expressed ideas around the theme of the environment and nature. Some expressed the initiatives in terms of environmental awareness on issues such as the oceans, food, ecology, recycling and the Ballymaloe Model was mentioned. Work on this issue was seen as relevant for church leaders on an interdenominational basis and also schools. Motivations for this approach included a sense of connection or kindness as well as stewardship.

Other comments emphasised this spiritual aspect, recognising that the environment impinges on our faith. Groups mentioned Creation Theology and Eco-spirituality; wanting Drumalis to provide people with opportunities to fall in love with Mother Nature, connect to the earth and build living communities.

For others there was a very direct connection made with the beauty of the ground at Drumalis and the resource that represents. Ideas included having a community orchard, increasing the sense of an open welcome to the community through having chairs and benches and access to a café. The space was seen to offer opportunities for active engagement through gardening as well as quiet reflective space. The healing aspects of

nature and growing things prompted the idea of outdoor outreach to those with dementia, depression, or other special needs.

Other suggestions on the theme of nature or living things were flower arranging courses for churches and getting another 'soul-full' rescue dog, like Scott (recognising the special ministry that interaction with animals can offer).

- **Training** (12 comments)

The present training programme was commended and a feeling named that it could be more widely promoted. In addition, groups wondered about diversifying the training offered to include: team work training (particularly for parishes); training for Lay Leaders of Eucharistic Services; training in presentation skills to encourage greater lay participation in parish groups/activities; broader courses – mindfulness, centering prayer etc; and several groups mentioned a follow on course from Pathways (perhaps without the accreditation aspect). There were also suggestions to diversity how courses are offered, for example short courses and more varied delivery days (not just Saturday). Training was also seen as a way to diversify the kinds of people attracted in to Drumalis through classes with wide appeal such as simple art, patisserie baking, floristry, or calligraphy.

iii. **Who we want to reach**

- **Men** (2 comments)

There were just a small number of references made to expanding the reach of Drumalis to include more men, but these were warmly received in the room and might be seen in the context of the gender profile of those contributing to the consultation process (i.e. 72% female) and the demography of church populations. There was a general desire to extend the vision to reach the male population and a specific suggestion to consider the Men's Shed opportunities through Peace IV initiatives in the area.

- **Families** (5 comments)

Some groups suggested that Drumalis could offer programmes to support marriage and families, or explore a ministry to families. They also wondered about having mixed age group learning such as family group activities that engage the whole family together, maybe with family retreats. On a slightly different tack, one group considered how to make

Drumalis and programmes more accessible for families by addressing childcare and cost aspects.

- **Children** (5 comments)

Some groups wanted the Drumalis experience to be offered more often to children through schools engagement, after school support, youth projects with schools, and confirmation retreats. And a couple of groups particularly wanted Drumalis to connect with children on the nature/environment issues and making the link with faith.

- **Youth** (23 comments)

Most contributors had something to raise regarding the present demography at Drumalis and the need to attract young people to experience what is available in that space. There were lots of comments urging Drumalis to reach out to young people and to support their spiritual growth – showing them the joy of life and how to love themselves. Respondents wanted young people to meet the same Drumalis that they have personally valued, therefore to be careful to maintain the spirituality of the place through silence, meditation and quiet time. These comments held a direct concern for the young people themselves and also an interest in the future sustainability for Drumalis. Drumalis was seen as a place that might offer a unique place for 18-40 year olds to explore their concerns and anxieties in an ever-changing world and to grow in spirit and in faith unbounded by “religiosity”.

There were suggestions that Drumalis might use more contemporary methods to engage young people such as music or film: And to provide a course offering a revision of the sacraments or youth friendly catechesis or Pathways programme.

A couple of the groups hoped that young people might be engaged on cross community or ecumenical issues; one suggesting an ecumenical version of “Youth 2000”.

One group suggested that Drumalis could work collaboratively with Youth Directors – thereby supporting work with young people indirectly.

Several people mentioned 'Gifts' workshops or "Faith & Light". Other topics that were seen as particularly relevant for young people included events for 'singletons', parenting courses, a series of vows for young people (connected with community models idea), support young people to develop their skills, talents and leadership qualities, or exploring different views of the world such as nonviolence and Quakers. There was a suggestion that Drumalis create a forum for young people that would help them explore issues and also share them with others in their community and beyond.

Some felt that it would be beneficial to offer opportunities for young people to get in touch with nature, including the idea of using treasure hunts to help them see the beauty of nature.

#### **iv. Character of Drumalis**

##### **- Link with Sisters, history, house (10 comments)**

There were a number of comments that seemed to relate to the character or nature of Drumalis, starting with the link with the Sisters of the Cross & Passion, for example a suggested museum on the history of the house and Order or open days with historic talks where guests would be shown around the architecture.

Groups named the Sisters as being at the heart of the community. They suggested additional Community Model, a new monastic community with a residential lay community alongside the Sisters; perhaps something akin to the Iona Community or offering short/medium/long term hermitage opportunities. It was also suggested that Drumalis could be location for monastic community teaching.

##### **- Church Resource (15 comments)**

There was a strong feeling that Drumalis should expand its role as a support into the wider Catholic Church. For example by creating bridges between lay and clergy which would promote joint spiritual development, engagement, relationship, trust, collaboration and co-responsibility. Drumalis might support male and female lay leadership in the Church, perhaps through programmes such as Called and Gifted or Parish Cell Evangelisation

The provisioning of the Church, and particularly lay members was suggested through the use of information days on Vatican Edicts or Documents; a training programme for laity in Catechists, with support to share their faith within Diocese; and providing retreat opportunities for lay people with ministry in parishes.

It was also suggested that Drumalis seek to build on their relationship with the Diocese.

- **Ecumenical/Inter-faith** (13 comments)

In terms of relationships, Drumalis was seen as a place that might help support Inter-church connections. Groups suggested that Drumalis might host more ecumenical events like joint office/liturgy of hours, prayer walks, joint theological discussions or choir/musical events. One group wondered if Drumalis could offer an ecumenical Pathways programme.

Beyond the ecumenical proposals some groups wanted Drumalis to offer space to consider Inter-faith connections, with support to explore other religions and with Inter-faith and also non-faith gatherings.

A few groups also raised the role for Drumalis in supporting reconciliation and cross community engagement.

So there is an interesting layering of ideas around the character of Drumalis – strongly identifying with its roots and Catholic identity, while also wanting to offer a place for encounters beyond that circle.

## **6) Individual Feedback**

People were given a quiet space within the consultation process when they could capture some individual feedback: “something else I would say to Drumalis...”

The overwhelming response to this was a desire to say 'thank you' and to express in very personal terms just how precious Drumalis has been for people, and their heartfelt hope that it can continue this good work into the future.

Here is a selection of the individual feedback offered by participants at the consultation sessions – chosen because they add something beyond the points already covered in the group contributions above.

- Huge thanks; would wish to be actively supportive and be part of Drumalis continuing to grow and flourish
- I would like to see the gardens of Drumalis opened as an oasis of sacred space to all who feel the need of a quiet place to pray and reflect, surrounded by the beauty of creation and the restaurant opened as a place to have a cup of tea and have fellowship, listening and sharing with others in a safe environment.
- Without my connection to Drumalis I would be a very directionless individual spiritually and personally. It is my safe anchored space whereby I have come to be comfortable with myself, my circumstances and passion for life and faith. Thank you.
- Would be lovely if [carer] groups could use Drumalis for their work with clients and carers as a safe space for sharing with others and meeting others who are on same journey as themselves whether a service user/client or carer.
- I love being here in Drumalis // I love helping here in Drumalis // I would love to explore the possibility of offering Centering Prayer here with trained men and women
- Whatever new directions are embraced it is crucial that we hold all of what is currently valuable both in what is offered and the intrinsic values that underpin the mission. This may mean new developments happen more slowly. It also begs the question is there anything/area that needs pruning to free up resources for new growth.

- WELLNESS including mental health is of fundamental importance for society today and it is not being understood, taught, practiced and improved at the level of community – A large gap in the market so to speak.
- Building on the idea of new monastic communities i.e. St Anselm's and the idea of such a gathered community resident here at Drumalis. I feel that this should be overseen mentored by Sisters who are the heart of the Community here now.
- I would like to see it used by immediate community. Have special days like a yearly fete for all the family. // Have possibly community garden offering fresh fruit and veg. Community orchard.
- I would like to thank you for creating this space where people of faith who are searching can come to experience the living Church. To be able to experience the love and acceptance of God in a very tangible way and where rest & encouragement are given. You have shown me how Christian community lived with authenticity and love can change the world. This is an experience of the Kingdom of God.
- The diocese would be so impoverished without Drumalis. The clerical church model isn't working & Drumalis offers a way into spirituality for people that the diocese isn't providing. The feminine energy is very positive & inclusive. Drumalis offers a modern, liberal & liberating theology, for which there is an increasing need in the modern world. It isn't constrained by a clerical, 'institution-centred' model.  
Drumalis abu!
- Thank you for all you are & do re: healing in a divided society – so important for Larne & beyond. Would there be a way of "extending" this to other faiths e.g. Muslim people in N. Ireland and to the Detention Centre in Larne...widening the circle of love & inclusion and reaching out to the stranger.
- For me Drumalis' biggest gift is that it 100% accepts people for who they are right now, not for who they 'could' be or 'should' be. It is one of the few places I can be totally myself
- Morale of clergy is an issue – as numbers decrease & big, urgent issues not being addressed.

- Drumalis is a special place and the Art of the House makes it particularly special – sculpture, painting, glass and architecture. It needs to have a wider profile and appreciation.
- Networking with those with similar vision – Eco-congregation; Corrymeela; Quakers and Mennonites – those whose vision is for a future full of hope and can deliver the skills needed to live & lead in such a way that this becomes reality – fight powerlessness. // Support young parents who want hope for their children.
- I believe that Drumalis can't be anything but successful because it is so evident that the Spirit of God is present here. In planning for the future I would see it as essential to spend some time in silence, listening to the voice of the Spirit leading and guiding so that we are tuned in to the will of God. // I love Drumalis. A very special place. God bless all those who work here and participate in activities here.
- This is a unique opportunity to share in the future of Drumalis and one I value and would like to be a part of.
- Larne is privileged to have such a wonderful asset in Drumalis. It has been a great help to many people at all religions. Its influence cannot be underestimated. I want it to grow and flourish in the future.
- All my thoughts about Drumalis are positive. I just hope it grows in doing what it already does so well that stays open to the new things that God would do. The LGBT community needs support & acceptance & a consistent witness of God's love.

## **7) Next Steps**

The consultation process with these three facilitated sessions serves a purpose within the wider discernment and decision making process. Those engagements have demonstrated a depth of love and commitment among Drumalis users, and the consultation process has harvested a wealth of ideas about the future. That encouragement and the resource of feedback are fuel for the next part of this wider process.



## **8) Conclusion**

The leadership of Drumalis have approached this consultation process with care and thoughtfulness. They have been rewarded with a huge and generous response from many people who have valued their connection with Drumalis, and would love to see it continuing to make a significant contribution into the future.

## **9) Appendices**

- i. Personal profile and feedback page – example
- ii. List of Catholic Parishes from which some participants came
- iii. Full chart showing religious connection of participants (if any)



## Appendix ii

### List of Catholic Parishes to which participants connected

5. Glenavy & K
6. Holy Family
7. St Michael's
8. St Mary's on the Hill
9. Ballycastle
10. St Malachy's, Coleraine
11. St MacNissis
12. Larne parish
13. St Patrick's, Ballynahinch
14. St Bernadette's, Belfast
15. St Anne's
16. St Gerard's, Belfast
17. Drumbo
18. St Bernard's, Glengormley
19. Glenarm
20. Carnlough
21. Ardkeen/Kircubbin
22. St Nicholas, Carrickfergus
23. Maghera
24. St Brigid's, Belfast
25. Glenravel
26. St John the Evangelist
27. Saintfield & Carrickmanna
28. Ballymena
29. Banbridge
30. St Malachy's, Belfast
31. Magheralin
32. Whiteabbey
33. Rasharkin
34. Newry
35. Ballyhackamore
36. Holy Rosary
37. St Colmcille's
38. Ardboe
39. St Peter's, Lurgan
40. St Paul's

### Appendix iii

Full chart showing religious connection of participants (if any)

