

Diocese of Cork and Ross

Diocesan Synthesis Report Summer 2025

This synthesis draws together the responses and reflections of people from the 16 families of parishes across the Diocese of Cork and Ross, four vibrant ethnic Catholic communities (Syro-Malabar, Syro-Malankara, Brazilian, and Polish) and members of Religious communities, in response to key questions about the life of our faith communities in our diocese.

A series of meetings was held in the autumn of 2024 and spring of 2025 following the publication in September 2024 of [Bishop Fintan Gavin's invitation](#) to participate in a Year of Prayer, Listening and Discernment. The gatherings across the diocese were facilitated by the Office for Mission and Ministry, aided by volunteers. The unified themes reflect a Church alive with hope, concern, and desire for renewal.

Overview

Across all consultations—parish, cultural, and religious—a strong unity of desire has emerged: to be a more inclusive, spiritually alive, and mission-oriented Church. Each group, in its own voice and tradition, affirmed the centrality of Baptism, Eucharist, and community as the living heart of Catholic identity.

Each Family of Parishes and faith community has received a detailed record of its own contributions at the meetings. A summary of these reports from each family of parishes and each faith community is available for reading/download on the diocesan website www.corkandross.org

This summary and Bishop Fintan's pastoral response are also available on the website.

There are five sections in this summary:

1. Responses from the Families of Parishes
2. Responses compared by category of parish
3. Responses from the new faith communities
4. Responses from communities of Religious.
5. Summary Conclusion.

Responses from the 16 Families of Parishes

Session 1: Baptism as Gateway into Faith Community

Thematic Analysis

1. Reclaiming Baptism's Meaning

- Most parishes emphasized a desire to recover baptism as a sacrament of community belonging, not just a family celebration.
- Some suggested linking baptisms more visibly with parish life (e.g., Sunday liturgies, naming ceremonies, anniversary mentions).

2. Support for Families

- Many parishes noted that parents and godparents need deeper formation to take baptismal promises seriously.
- Requests for preparation courses, mentor couples, and post-baptism follow-ups emerged frequently.

3. Building Ongoing Connection

- Baptism should be the start of lifelong involvement in the community, especially through children's liturgies, youth ministry, and hospitality.

Comparisons and Contrasts

Common Themes	Divergences Across Parishes
Call for more visible baptismal celebration	Some see it liturgically; others focus on catechesis
Desire to support parents	Some recommend small groups; others want structured courses
Emphasis on lifelong connection	A few parishes lack capacity for follow-up programs

Session 2: Celebrating the Sunday Eucharist

Thematic Analysis

1. Eucharist as a Source of Mission

- Parishes see Eucharist not only as worship but as the spiritual engine for evangelization.

2. Importance of Liturgical Quality

- Many called for better homilies, music, and inclusive liturgical language to deepen engagement.
- Some stressed the need for more contemplative space, others for greater energy and youth involvement.

3. Preparation and Participation

- There's growing interest in pre-Mass scripture reflection, encouraging confession, and involving families in preparation.
- Emphasis on forming lay readers, Eucharistic ministers, and hospitality teams.

Comparisons and Contrasts

Shared Desires	Local Variations
Nourishing Eucharist experience	Some focus on silence and solemnity; others on joy and welcome
Greater lay involvement	Parishes vary in how many laypeople are already engaged
Liturgical beauty and clarity	Rural parishes mention music gaps; urban ones focus on homily quality

Session 3: Review of Families of Parishes (7 Questions)

Q1. Support to Parish Life

- Many parishes report greater collaboration, resource sharing, and morale boosts.
- Others expressed concerns over reduced autonomy and coordination challenges.

Q2. Parish Contributions to Family

- Parishes contribute via ministries, sharing priests, hosting events.
- A few parishes feel they give more than they receive, especially smaller ones.

Q3. Challenges

- Communication gaps, reduced priest availability, and identity confusion were cited.
- Some struggle with overlapping leadership roles and undefined structures.

Q4. Celebrating Sacraments Together

- Mixed reactions: some enjoy shared confirmations or pilgrimages.
- Others worry that sacramental prep becomes impersonal in larger clusters.

Q5. Engaging Young People

- All parishes see this as urgent.
- Proposals included youth-led liturgies, service projects, digital media use.
- Some admitted having no youth at all.

Q6. Supporting Ministries

- Desire for standardized training, better coordination, and spiritual renewal for teams.
- Many praised the contributions of volunteer-led ministries but said they need ongoing support.

Q7. Vision for the Next 5–10 Years

- Hopeful vision: co-responsible Church with lay leadership and inclusive ministry.
- Concerns: priest shortages, aging congregations, and fear of parish closures.

Comparative Table of Session 3 Themes

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Widespread Agreement</i>	<i>Differences Noted</i>
Collaboration is growing ✓		Mixed confidence in structures
Priest shortage is impacting all ✓		Solutions differ—some suggest more lay roles, others seek recruitment
Lay leadership must grow ✓		Level of readiness/training varies
Youth engagement is urgent ✓		Some have no youth; others have vibrant groups
Sacramental coordination	Mixed	Some love joint celebrations; others miss intimacy

Principal Observations

Priority	Summary Across All Sessions
Formation	Needed at every stage: baptism, Eucharist, ministry, leadership
Mission and Evangelization	Baptism and Eucharist are seen as catalysts for outreach
Hospitality and Welcome	All want to be more welcoming, but practical methods vary
Leadership Development	Strong call for lay training, especially amid priest shortages
Structural Clarity	Families of Parishes need clearer roles and better communication

Diocesan Summary by Parish Category

1. City Parishes

City parishes emphasized the importance of publicly recognizing baptism within the wider faith community. There was a strong call for post-baptism family engagement, such as naming newly baptized children at Mass, integrating them into community events, and fostering a culture of welcome. These parishes tended to view baptism not just as a family moment, but as a communal rite of belonging.

Regarding the Eucharist, city parishes consistently requested more vibrant and engaging liturgies. There was an emphasis on homiletic quality, music, and the desire for a more participatory and energizing celebration. City congregations—often larger and more diverse—seek celebrations that are both meaningful and inclusive, especially for younger adults and newcomers.

When reflecting on the Family of Parishes model, city parishes were generally positive about increased networking and collaboration, though they noted the logistical challenges that come with operating at scale. Concerns were raised about the complexity of communication, and some feared losing the distinctive identity of their local parish within the broader structure.

2. Suburban Parishes

Suburban parishes placed significant focus on integrating baptism into parish life, particularly through parish schools and sacramental preparation programs. The emphasis was on creating a seamless journey from baptism through childhood faith development, ensuring that baptism marks the beginning of an ongoing relationship with the Church.

Eucharistic celebrations in suburban areas reflected a strong desire for family-oriented liturgies. These parishes prioritized engagement of children and families, often expressing a need for more trained lay ministers and inclusive liturgical formats that could draw in disengaged parishioners.

In terms of collaboration, suburban parishes showed openness to the Family of Parishes approach but stressed the importance of local leadership and initiative. There was a desire to balance collaborative efforts with parish autonomy, with several calls for clearer structures and greater lay formation to support ministry within the new model.

3. Town Parishes

Town-based parishes expressed a need for more intentional follow-up after baptism. There was an emphasis on making families feel welcomed and connected beyond the sacrament, with some parishes proposing structured support like mentoring programs or welcome ministries. The visibility of baptism in parish life was seen as an opportunity to grow community cohesion.

The Eucharist was described as needing both tradition and renewal. While many appreciated existing structures, there was a growing awareness of the need to involve youth, enhance participation, and provide more contextualized preaching. Some parishes reported a struggle with aging congregations and fewer young families.

On the Family of Parishes model, town parishes recognized the value of shared resources, particularly in terms of priests and ministry teams. However, concerns were raised about the potential erosion of parish identity, especially where changes were introduced without clear communication or sufficient lay involvement.

4. Rural Parishes

In rural communities, the focus was on the role of community ties in baptism. Respondents often highlighted how extended families, neighbours, and small congregations provide a natural support network for newly baptized children and their parents. There was a call to revive traditional communal rituals, such as public welcome ceremonies during Sunday Mass.

When discussing the Eucharist, rural parishes sought simplicity, reverence, and regularity. Many expressed appreciation for a more quiet and reflective form of worship, but also noted concerns around declining numbers, especially among younger parishioners. There was a hope to retain frequency of Masses, even with fewer priests available.

Responses to the Family of Parishes model were mixed. Some saw the benefits of joint celebrations and larger community events, while others worried about being marginalized or losing their local priest. There was a strong call for clearer support systems and recognition of the distinct needs of smaller, often older, rural congregations.

[Families of Parishes] Conclusion

While parishes across the diocese are diverse in context and character, several unifying themes emerged:

- A shared desire to strengthen baptismal catechesis and make baptism the true beginning of lifelong community belonging.
- A strong emphasis on renewing the Sunday Eucharist as a spiritually nourishing and mission-inspiring event.

- A widespread acknowledgment that the Family of Parishes model holds promise, but that it must be carefully implemented with attention to local identity, lay leadership, and pastoral capacity.

This parish-category perspective highlights the importance of flexible pastoral planning, tailored to different community types, and grounded in the lived reality of people across the diocese.

Responses from the New Faith Communities in Cork and Ross

This is a thematic summary of the responses provided by parishioners and clergy at three gatherings with faith communities comprised of recent immigrants to Ireland. These are the Syro-Malabar and The Syro-Malankara communities (from India), the Polish community and the Brazilian community. The three gathering were held in the Spring of 2025 in response to Bishop Fintan's Pastoral Message of September 2024. The Bishop called for prayer, listening and discernment centred on three topics:-

- **Question 1. How can we make baptism the gateway into life in our faith community?**
- **Question 2. How can priests, deacons and parishioners prepare for and celebrate the Sunday Eucharist so that we are nourished and strengthened to tell others about Christ?**
- **Question 3. How, through our Catholic community, can we help those to whom we minister to connect and engage with our parish and Family of Parishes?**

1. Making Baptism the Gateway to Community Life

Common Themes:

- All communities view baptism as a pivotal moment, not only as a sacrament but as the beginning of a lifelong journey of faith.
- Parental involvement and ongoing catechesis are strongly emphasized.
- There is broad recognition of the need for the faith community to welcome, support, and celebrate baptism in a communal context.

Comparative Insights:

- The Syro-Malabar and Polish communities stress structured preparation for parents and godparents, aiming for deeper understanding of the sacrament and its implications.
- The Syro-Malankara community focuses more spiritually on the encounter with the Holy Spirit and stresses the need for families to model prayer and piety at home.
- The Brazilian response highlights baptism as a new journey and belonging, encouraging vibrant community rituals and the importance of choosing godparents who are actively engaged in faith.

Contrast:

- While the Syro-Malabar community emphasizes systematic faith formation and lifelong catechesis, the Brazilian and Polish communities put more focus on ritual celebration and community identity.
- The Syro-Malankara community uniquely sees baptism more as initiation into a mystical transformation, stressing inward spiritual growth.

2. Preparing for and Celebrating the Sunday Eucharist

Common Themes:

- All communities agree on the need for spiritual preparation, including confession, reflection, and reverent participation.
- Lay participation is encouraged, particularly in readings, music, and preparation of liturgies.
- The Eucharist is understood as both source and summit—a time to be spiritually nourished and to be sent out in mission.

Comparative Insights:

- The Syro-Malabar community places strong emphasis on pre-Mass confession, Scripture engagement, and doctrinal understanding of the Real Presence.
- The Syro-Malankara community mirrors this in tone, stressing fasting, reverence, and instruction for children, and encouraging deep personal devotion.
- Brazilian responses bring in Lectio Divina, hospitality, and community-building around Eucharist, integrating formation and joy.
- Polish participants advocate for Eucharistic adoration, scripture study, and reverent liturgies that engage both mind and heart.

Contrast:

- The Brazilian approach integrates Eucharist with social celebration and inclusion, while The Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara communities place heavier weight on ritual discipline and personal piety.
- Polish responses provide a balance between personal devotion and communal participation, with attention to bilingual liturgies for integration.

3. Fostering Engagement with Parish and Family of Parishes

Common Themes:

- All communities prioritize hospitality, shared responsibility, and pastoral outreach, especially to the sick and marginalized.
- The importance of youth involvement and lay ministries recurs across responses.
- There is a shared desire for unity in diversity, with cultural integration being key in multicultural dioceses.

Comparative Insights:

- The Syro-Malabar community's responses detail a wide range of integration strategies—from carpooling and social events to lay leadership and ministry training.

- The Syro-Malankara community emphasizes monthly prayer meetings, personal recognition, and spiritual accompaniment.
- The Brazilian community leans into celebration, communal meals, and joyful welcome, especially for new or struggling families.
- Polish feedback highlights the need for cultural sensitivity, multilingual Masses, and creating spaces where faith and heritage are preserved and shared.

Contrast:

- The Syro-Malankara community's model is more intimate and contemplative, with small group focus and spiritual depth.
- The Brazilian approach is markedly expressive, celebratory, and inclusive, focusing on shared meals and emotional support.
- Polish responses center around structured gatherings and liturgical beauty, with a growing openness to digital and bilingual engagement.

Notable Themes Across All Groups

- **Parental Formation:** Seen as essential across all groups for ensuring baptism leads to ongoing faith practice.
- **Youth Engagement:** All communities acknowledge the need to actively include youth through ministry, music, service, and catechesis.
- **Lay Involvement:** Recognized as a necessary response to priest shortages and essential for Church vitality.
- **Hospitality and Welcome:** Viewed not only as a pastoral need but as an evangelizing act.

[New Faith Communities] Conclusion

This collective reflection reveals a Church that is richly diverse yet spiritually unified. Whether through reverent liturgies, catechetical formation, small-group prayer, or vibrant communal gatherings, each community brings unique gifts to the wider Church in Ireland. By honouring each expression, while encouraging mutual learning, these communities offer a vision of Church that is truly synodal—listening, discerning, and walking together.

Responses from the Communities of Religious in Cork and Ross

This report is a thematic summary of the responses provided by members of vowed religious communities.

The engagement with them was held in the Spring of 2025 in response to Bishop Fintan's Pastoral Message of September 2024. The religious communities were asked to respond to two topics:-

- **How can Religious, as baptised Christians faithful to their charism, help people live their baptismal calling in our Parishes and Family of Parishes?**
- **How can Religious, by virtue of their commitment, presence, and witness, play a part in making our Diocese a more inclusive Church and more relevant to people's lives?**

A. Baptismal calling

Several **recurring themes** emerged from the responses:

- **Witness through daily life:** Almost every community emphasized the power of lived witness over words, showing baptismal calling through kindness, prayer, and fidelity to one's charism.
- **Support for families and faith formation:** Many advocated supporting parents, godparents, and parishioners through preparation, formation groups, and accessible conversations about faith.
- **Hospitality and inclusion:** Openness to others, especially the poor, the elderly, immigrants, and the marginalized, was a strong expression of baptismal living.
- **Charism as mission:** Each community showed how its **charism** (e.g. service, education, compassion, preaching) can uniquely contribute to helping others live their baptismal call.
- **Collaboration with the parish and diocese:** Suggestions included supporting parish ministries, faith-based events, sacramental preparation, and shared prayer gatherings.

Thematic Summary

1. Living Witness and Christian Example

Many communities believe the most effective way Religious can support baptismal identity is through **daily witness** to Gospel values:

- *Presentation communities* spoke of joy, kindness, hope, and integrity in living faith publicly.
- *Religious Sisters of Charity* emphasized love, kindness, and prayerful presence as expressions of charism.

- *Redemptorists* and *Daughters of Charity* promoted a prophetic presence, particularly through preaching, hospitality, and welcoming the marginalized.

2. Support for Faith Formation

Religious can offer **catechesis and faith development** through:

- Baptism preparation classes and post-baptism family support.
- Spiritual formation (e.g., *Lectio Divina*, Alpha, small groups).
- Encouragement of RCIA for older children (as noted by the Presentation Ballyphehane community).
- The *Redemptorists* emphasized the need for **realistic catechesis** responsive to modern cultural contexts.

3. Charism-Driven Service

Each community shared how their unique **founder's charism** continues to serve the baptismal call of others:

- *Presentation Sisters* invoked Nano Nagle's heart for the poor and education.
- *Religious Sisters of Charity* focused on spiritual and material poverty.
- *Daughters of Charity* suggested facilitating open conversations on faith, welcoming diverse backgrounds.
- *Redemptorists* highlighted their preaching mission and retreat ministry.

4. Encouraging Community and Belonging

Several responses highlighted how Religious can promote **inclusive community life**:

- Through pastoral presence, prayerful hospitality, and one-on-one listening.
- Organizing social or spiritual gatherings (e.g., morning cuppas, prayer groups).
- Fostering a deeper understanding that *baptism is the foundation of all vocation*.

5. Engagement with the Marginalized

This was a strong theme for most communities:

- *Presentation Deerpark* emphasized presence among the marginalized.
- *South Presentation* and *Daughters of Charity* stressed connections with immigrants, the elderly, and the poor.
- *Redemptorists* proposed targeted outreach to those underserved by parish structures.

[Baptism] Comparative Summary Table

Community	Key Contributions	Unique Emphases
Presentation Ballyphehane	Faith education for parents, baptism preparation, community prayer	Liturgical celebration of Baptism, naming and blessing of children
North Presentation	Respect, listening, faith witness, environmental spirituality (Laudato Si)	Youth engagement via social/ecological action
South Presentation	Hospitality, care for the poor, prayer, parish support	Vincent de Paul links, immigrant outreach
Deerpark Presentation	Witness, prophetic presence, inclusion of marginalized, ongoing support	Role of Religious in modeling Christian life for parish
Daughters of Charity	Hospitality, conversation, formation groups, outreach to the “unchurched”	Inviting dialogue about faith and identity
Religious Sisters of Charity	Kindness, aging with dignity, service of the poor, hope, prayerful presence	Collaboration with elderly and joy through presence
Redemptorists	Mission, catechesis, prophetic preaching, facilities for events, spiritual retreats, outreach programs	Strong call for prophetic role and creative catechesis

[Baptism] Conclusion

The Religious communities bring a rich diversity of perspectives shaped by their **charisms**, but united in a desire to help others **live out their baptism** through:

- Faithful presence
- Lived Gospel values
- Ongoing formation
- Welcoming the forgotten
- Collaborative ministry

Together, they reflect the Church’s multifaceted richness and offer a powerful spiritual and pastoral resource for the Families of Parishes initiative.

B. How can Religious, by virtue of their commitment, presence, and witness, play a part in making our Diocese a more inclusive Church and more relevant to people's lives?

The following trends emerge:

1. **Welcoming and Hospitality:** A widely affirmed approach—building inclusion by simply *welcoming people as they are*, with no judgment or conditions.
2. **Listening and Respectful Presence:** Many communities stress the need for *attentive listening* and *quality presence* that values each person's journey.
3. **Faith Formation and Spiritual Support:** Some call for *new faith experiences* beyond formal schooling or sacraments—like *retreats, adult literacy, or prayer groups*.
4. **Social Inclusion and Outreach:** Engagement with *immigrants, prisoners, the poor, youth, and marginalized groups* featured in nearly every community's response.
5. **Collaboration with Laity and Clergy:** Several ask for religious to be more involved in *parish councils, diocesan planning, and formation for clergy and lay leaders*.
6. **Charism and Gospel Living:** Most believe *living their charism*—through compassion, humility, or prayer—is their clearest path to making the Church relevant.

Thematic Summary by Focus Area

1. Witness Through Presence

- All communities see everyday Gospel witness—through kindness, prayer, and humility—as foundational.
- The *Sisters of Charity, South Presentation, and Deerpark* communities emphasize joy, respect, and non-judgmental attitudes as welcoming signs of faith.
- *Religious Sisters of Charity* and *Redemptorists* mention presence among the elderly and poor as essential.

2. Hospitality and Inclusion

- *South Presentation, Daughters of Charity, and Deerpark Presentation* affirm the power of hospitality—welcoming immigrants, organizing tea mornings, or simply greeting newcomers warmly.
- The *Daughters of Charity* go further, suggesting a chaplain for African communities and research into those alienated from Church.

3. Reflective Engagement and Faith Formation

- *Ballyphehane* calls for better **formation for lay leaders and youth**—pointing out that participation won't grow without adequate training.
- *North Presentation* suggests that Religious can **lead meditation groups** to reach those outside formal religion.

- *Deerpark* and *Religious Sisters of Charity* emphasize spiritual literacy—teaching people to pray, offering adult literacy, and demystifying liturgy.

4. Engaging the Marginalized

- All communities identify groups at the **margins** of Church life—immigrants, refugees, Travellers, prisoners, lapsed Catholics.
- *Redemptorists* propose linking Cork parishes with *international missions* to broaden horizons and encourage global solidarity.

5. Role of Religious in Parish and Diocesan Life

- Several responses reflect concern that Religious are not fully integrated into the Family of Parishes structure.
- *Deerpark Presentation* and *Redemptorists* call for Religious to be present at planning meetings, not as a separate group but as integral participants.

Comparative Table of Emphases by Religious Community

<i>Community</i>	<i>Presence & Witness</i>	<i>Hospitality & Welcome</i>	<i>Formation & Education</i>	<i>Outreach to Marginalized</i>	<i>Role in Church Structures</i>
Presentation Ballyphehane	✓ Strong	✓ Strong	✓ Strong	○ Limited	✓ Moderate
North Presentation	✓ Strong	✓ Moderate	✓ Moderate	○ Limited	○ Low
South Presentation	✓ Strong	✓ Strong	○ Moderate	✓ Moderate	○ Low
Deerpark Presentation	✓ Strong	✓ Strong	✓ Strong	✓ Strong	✓ Strong
Daughters of Charity	✓ Moderate	✓ Strong	✓ Strong	✓ Strong	✓ Strong
Religious Sisters of Charity	✓ Strong	✓ Strong	✓ Strong	✓ Moderate	○ Low
Redemptorists	✓ Strong	✓ Strong	✓ Strong	✓ Very Strong	✓ Strong

[Religious] Conclusion

The Religious communities clearly believe that **faith lived with integrity, openness, and a servant's heart** is key to making the Diocese of Cork and Ross:

- **More inclusive** (welcoming people where they are),
- **More relevant** (responding to real human needs), and

- **More participative** (involving the baptized—clergy, laity, and Religious—in walking together).

Each community draws from its unique **charism and pastoral experience**, offering a distinct but unified vision for a **synodal, listening, welcoming Church**.

Summary Conclusion

Priorities Across All Respondents

Theme	Expressions Across Groups
Baptismal Identity	Call to reclaim baptism as a lifelong vocation and foundation for all ministry.
Lay Leadership	All groups ask for better formation and increased roles for lay people, especially youth.
Welcoming and Inclusion	Emphasis on being present to migrants, elderly, sick, and marginalized.
Prayer and Formation	Desire for deeper adult catechesis, scripture study, and spiritual renewal.
Youth Engagement	Seen as vital. All seek new ways to form and accompany the next generation.
Integration of Religious	Religious communities request active roles in parish and diocesan planning.
Witness Through Charism	Each Religious institute emphasized the richness of its founder's mission as a gift to the Church.

Comparative Insights

Group	Strengths Highlighted	Unique Challenges or Emphases
Families of Parishes	Local engagement, evolving collaboration, pastoral trust	Priest shortages, uneven integration
Cultural Communities	Rich diversity, vibrant traditions, lay energy	Language and cultural inclusion, generational gaps
Religious Communities	Faithful witness, charism-based service, prophetic voice	Integration into structures, aging membership

Conclusion

The Diocesan Church is rich in faith, diverse in expression, and united in yearning. From Religious life to parish pews, from newly baptized children to faithful worshippers, there is a desire to **pray, listen, and discern together** how to be a missionary Church of co-responsibility, welcome, and vibrant Eucharistic faith.

The next steps—considered in forthcoming gatherings—must build on this foundation, with continued synodal listening and action-oriented responses rooted in the baptismal call of every believer.