

# Diocese of Cork and Ross

## Prayer, Listening and Discerning 2024–2025

This report is a thematic summary of the responses provided by parishioners and clergy at three gatherings in the Family of Parishes which includes Ardfield & Rathbarry, Barryroe, Clonakilty, Kilmeen & Castleventry, Rosscarbery & Lisavaird and Timoleague.

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:-

- A. How can we make baptism the gateway into life in our faith community?
- B. 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?
- C. Session 3 was a review of the families of parishes and posed seven questions for consideration.

*Themes under each topic are given in order in which they are highlighted in the responses.*

### A. On Baptism:-

#### 1. Stronger Baptism Preparation

All six parishes emphasized the need for **preparation programmes** to help parents understand the **meaning, responsibilities, and communal aspect** of baptism.

- **Ardfield & Rathbarry, Barryroe, Clonakilty, Timoleague** proposed home visits, group meetings, or informal chats before the baptism.
- **Clonakilty** suggests a multi-stage course including theological reflection.
- **Barryroe** recommends using experienced laypeople to mentor new families.

#### 2. Baptism During Mass & Public Recognition

A recurring idea was the desire to integrate baptism into Sunday Eucharist to strengthen **communal celebration** and parish connection.

- **Timoleague, Clonakilty, Barryroe, Kilmeen** recommend celebrating baptisms during Sunday Mass.
- **Rosscarbery** and **Ardfield & Rathbarry** support anniversary Masses and community blessings.
- **Many** called for baptism announcements and recognition during parish liturgies.

#### 3. Follow-up & Ongoing Engagement

There is strong concern about the **drop-off after baptism**. Respondents want structured follow-up:

- **Annual Masses** for newly baptized children (**Clonakilty, Timoleague, Rosscarbery**)

- **Children's/family Masses** and ongoing invitations to parish events (**Ardfield, Barryroe, Kilmeen**)
- **Encouraging regular Mass attendance** by making families feel welcome.

#### 4. Welcoming Environment & Child-Friendly Spaces

Many parishes want the church to feel **accessible and comfortable** for families with young children.

- **Cry rooms, children's areas, artwork, and activity packs** are widely suggested (e.g., **Barryroe, Kilmeen, Clonakilty**).
- Timoleague, Barryroe, and Ardfield propose **toy boxes, family rooms, or gated areas** for toddlers.

#### 5. Parish Social Life & Community Building

Creating social spaces was proposed to help families feel like they belong:

- **Post-Mass tea/coffee, Easter egg hunts, family days, and fun days** (e.g., **Clonakilty, Kilmeen, Timoleague**)
- **Mom & toddler groups** or faith-based support groups (e.g., **Barryroe, Kilmeen**)

#### 6. Education & Faith Formation

Concern about **parents' lack of faith knowledge** was a strong undercurrent.

- Suggestions included:
  - Adult catechesis (**Clonakilty**),
  - Alpha/Sycamore courses,
  - Sunday school/faith days for children (**Kilmeen, Rosscarbery**),
  - School-parish links to extend religious teaching beyond sacraments (**Timoleague, Ardfield**).

### REPEATED CONCERNS & INNOVATIONS

Theme	Examples
<b>Pre-baptism engagement</b>	Home visits, informal chats, baptism prep teams
<b>Integration into Sunday Mass</b>	Baptisms during Mass; baptism anniversaries marked in the liturgy
<b>Family-friendly Church</b>	Soundproof rooms, children's corners, visual art spaces
<b>Follow-up beyond the day</b>	Annual Mass, toddler groups, faith milestones celebrated
<b>Parish as social &amp; spiritual community</b>	Monthly family gatherings, tea/coffee, fun events
<b>School linkage</b>	Schools involved in Mass prep, art displays, prayers
<b>Pastoral tone</b>	Emphasis on being non-judgmental and inclusive, regardless of practice level

## CONCLUSION

These six parishes reflect a **strong desire to revitalize Baptism as both a sacrament and a community gateway**. Core strategies include:

- **Deeper preparation**, both spiritual and relational,
- **Post-baptism connection and follow-up**,
- **Public liturgical celebration**, and
- **Making the parish genuinely welcoming to modern families**.

There's a common recognition that **baptism must be seen not just as a rite**, but as an **entry into a vibrant, ongoing relationship** with God, the Church, and the local faith community.

## B. On the Eucharist

### 1. Participation and Inclusion

- **Universal Call to Involvement:** Every parish emphasizes involving more people in the liturgy – including young people, children, and families – as readers, singers, altar servers, or gift bearers.
- **Ministers of Welcome:** Welcoming teams or individuals greeting people at the door is widely recommended.
- **Lay Leadership:** There's strong support for lay-led prayer groups, scripture study, Lectio Divina, and post-Mass discussions.

### 2. Youth Engagement

- **Youth Masses:** Youth-led liturgies are frequently proposed to encourage engagement.
- **Formation and Education:** Suggestions include youth choirs, faith education through school partnerships, and opportunities like involvement in altar service, choir, or readings.

### 3. Faith Formation and Catechesis

- **Understanding the Mass:** Strong emphasis on catechesis – particularly the Eucharist's significance, signs, symbols, and gestures.
- **Pre-Mass Preparation:** Encouraging parishioners to read the Sunday readings in advance is a common suggestion.
- **Ongoing Faith Formation:** Suggestions include adult education, Alpha, Sycamore, RCIA, and integration of the Catechism.

### 4. Homilies and Relevance

- **Practical and Relatable:** Homilies should connect the Gospel to real-life experiences, offering clear messages.
- **Brevity and Engagement:** Many suggest 8–10 minute homilies that are relevant and well-prepared.

### 5. Welcoming Atmosphere

- **Physical and Social Environment:** Warm churches, friendly greetings, social gatherings (e.g. post-Mass tea), and music were noted as critical to fostering belonging.
- **Silence and Reverence:** Suggested periods of silence before/after Mass, and emphasis on dignity during Eucharistic prayer.

### 6. Music and Liturgy

- **Music as a Core Element:** Many emphasize choirs (including youth choirs), congregational singing, and music that matches liturgical themes.

- **Children's Liturgies:** Separate children's liturgies or simpler explanations are widely recommended.

## 7. Technology and Communication

- **Use of Digital Tools:** Some suggest WhatsApp groups, parish apps, and digital reading plans to reach younger and disconnected parishioners.
- **Visual Aids:** Ideas like displaying hymns on screens and distributing simplified bulletins are common.

## 8. Living the Faith Beyond Mass

- **Daily Christian Living:** Acts of kindness, prayer, social involvement, and service to others are encouraged as essential expressions of faith.
- **Connection with the Broader Community:** Ideas include home visits, outdoor Masses, community projects, and links to school and youth clubs.

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## Comparison and Contrast by Parish

Parish	Notable Contributions	Distinctive Focus
<b>Ardfield &amp; Rathbarry</b>	Youth involvement post-Confirmation, school links, live out faith daily, reduce reliance on same volunteers.	Strong emphasis on <i>parish ownership</i> and expanding youth roles in the liturgy.
<b>Barryroe</b>	Practical liturgical improvements, links with Scouts, social events, and alternative Mass locations.	A well-rounded approach that blends <b>reverence</b> , <b>youth</b> , and <b>innovation</b> .
<b>Clonakilty</b>	Very detailed strategies for welcome, child/youth inclusion, choir development, and Mass explanation.	Focus on <b>education through practice</b> and <b>parental support</b> during sacramental prep.
<b>Kilmeen &amp; Castleventry</b>	Strong emphasis on weekly preparation (e.g. prayer groups), youth groups, and post-Mass social activities.	Practical grassroots strategies like <i>tea mornings</i> , <i>youth car washes</i> , and <i>monthly meetings</i> .
<b>Rosscarbery &amp; Lisavaird</b>	Emphasis on sermon relevance, praying for the sick and youth, and promoting dignity in sacramental practices.	Deep focus on the <b>sacramental meaning</b> and spiritual accompaniment.
<b>Timoleague</b>	Deep catechesis on Eucharist, youth inclusion, daily reflections, and a multi-channel communication plan.	High integration of <b>technology</b> , <b>parish councils</b> , and <b>liturgical formation</b> .

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## Conclusion

Across all six parishes, there is a shared desire to:

- Deepen understanding of the Eucharist,
- Make the Sunday Mass more participatory and relevant,
- Welcome and engage people of all ages, especially youth,
- Promote living the faith through daily acts and service.

The **core contrasts** lie in approach:

- Some prioritize **catechesis and education** (Timoleague, Clonakilty),
- Others lean into **community building and social gathering** (Kilmeen, Barryroe),
- And some emphasize **liturgical dignity and reverence** (Rosscarbery, Barryroe).

## C. On the Families of Parishes

### 1. How has the Family of Parishes supported parish life in your parish?

#### Thematic Summary:

- **Sustained Access to Sacraments:** All parishes strongly affirmed the value of shared priests, which ensures weekend Masses and the administration of sacraments despite the declining number of clergy.
- **Liturgical Diversity and Enrichment:** Parishioners appreciated experiencing different priests and styles of homily, enhancing spiritual engagement.
- **Resource Sharing:** The establishment of a central parish office (Clonakilty) and coordinated Mass times were highlighted as practical benefits.
- **Pastoral Collaboration:** Joint services for events like reconciliation and feast days have fostered mutual support.

#### Comparative Notes:

- Smaller parishes (Ardfield & Rathbarry, Kilmeen & Castleventry) emphasized dependence on shared priests more heavily than Clonakilty or Barryroe.
- Timoleague expressed both appreciation and concern, noting a perceived imbalance in central office support.

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### 2. How is your parish supporting the Family of Parishes?

#### Thematic Summary:

- **Lay Involvement:** Altar servers, readers, Eucharistic ministers, and funeral teams were cited as core contributors to sustaining parish life.
- **Participation in Shared Initiatives:** Attendance at planning meetings, Alpha programs, and inter-parish events indicates emerging collaboration.
- **Flexibility and Openness:** Many parishes noted their willingness to accept Mass time changes and support shared clergy.

#### Contrasts:

- While Clonakilty and Barryroe showed stronger structural participation and leadership, Ardfield & Rathbarry admitted to limited lay infrastructure.
- Timoleague was vocal in its critique of administrative shortcomings and lack of communication from central offices.

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### 3. What have been the challenges since becoming part of the Family of Parishes?

#### Thematic Summary:

- **Mass Time Changes and Priest Availability:** Most parishes expressed frustration over altered Mass times and the absence of resident priests.
- **Communication Gaps:** Lack of consistent newsletters, unclear administrative responsibilities, and confusion over parish identity were noted.
- **Young Adult Engagement:** Across the board, the most significant concern was the absence of young people in active parish life.

**Notable Concerns:**

- Timoleague cited several specific instances of feeling excluded from diocesan or centralised events.
  - Kilmeen & Castleventry felt marginalised in sacramental celebrations and resources.
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#### 4. How can we celebrate sacramental life as a Family of Parishes?

**Thematic Summary:**

- **Collaborative Sacramental Celebrations:** Parishes advocated for joint services, shared choirs, and cross-parish preparation for sacraments.
- **Parental and Lay Involvement:** Many proposed more active roles for parents and lay leaders in faith formation.
- **Reclaiming Traditional Practices:** Ideas like house Stations, outdoor prayers, and community celebrations were mentioned as revival opportunities.

**Differences in Vision:**

- Clonakilty and Barryroe emphasised structural and liturgical planning, while rural parishes leaned towards community-focused and home-based events.
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#### 5. How do we encourage young people to participate in the faith community?

**Thematic Summary:**

- **Inclusion in Liturgy:** Suggestions included roles like altar servers, readers, collectors, and youth choirs.
- **Youth-Oriented Events:** Youth Masses, retreats, and community events were proposed to foster engagement.
- **Education and Role Models:** Several respondents called for deeper catechesis and visible faith leaders among young adults.

**Common Challenge:**

- All parishes agreed that engaging youth is increasingly difficult due to societal shifts and competing interests, especially sports and social media.
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## 6. How can our ministries be further supported?

### Thematic Summary:

- **Training and Formation:** Nearly all parishes requested structured training, refresher sessions, and formation opportunities.
- **Centralised Coordination:** Many supported the idea of a shared calendar, joint training sessions, and communication tools across the Family.
- **Volunteer Recruitment:** Greater lay involvement, especially from younger adults, was seen as essential.

### Notable Insights:

- Barryroe and Clonakilty requested clear guidelines and more strategic planning, while smaller parishes expressed need for visibility and acknowledgment.

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## 7. What do you hope our Family of Parishes will look like in 5–10 years?

### Thematic Summary:

- **Lay Leadership and Inclusion:** Respondents envisioned a more empowered laity, possibly including lay deacons and coordinated leadership bodies.
- **Sustainable Sacramental Life:** There was a hope that all churches would remain open with regular sacraments, supported by fewer priests and more lay ministers.
- **Vibrant Community Spirit:** Many spoke of dreams for renewed community life, youth involvement, and intergenerational faith experiences.

### Tensions Identified:

- While some anticipate church closures as inevitable, others fiercely defended the importance of maintaining worship in local churches.

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## Conclusion:

This Family of Parishes demonstrates a strong foundation of faith, resilience, and creativity amid structural change. There is deep appreciation for shared pastoral resources and an emerging culture of collaboration. However, the responses also reflect a desire for better communication, more consistent support for smaller parishes, and serious action to re-engage youth. Future steps must prioritize training, coordinated planning, and a shared vision that values all constituent communities equally.