

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 Aughadow, Castlehaven and Myross, Kilmacabea, Skibbereen and Rath and the Islands.

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. Baptism as a Community Event

Across all parishes, there was a strong call to move away from viewing baptism as a private, isolated ritual. Instead, there was widespread support for seeing it as a **public act of integration** into the faith community. **Castlehaven and Myross** emphasized this the most, suggesting post-baptism support groups and involving the community during the ceremony. Other parishes echoed similar sentiments, advocating for communal welcome during Sunday Masses.

2. Parental Commitment and Preparation

The importance of **parental reflection and intention** was a prominent theme. Most parishes advocated for preparatory meetings or workshops to help parents understand the sacrament's significance and their long-term role in their child's faith journey. **Skibbereen, Kilmacabea, and Castlehaven & Myross** all stressed the need for deeper engagement before baptism occurs, even questioning whether families are genuinely committed or fulfilling a cultural expectation.

3. Welcoming and Inclusive Atmosphere

Creating a **non-judgmental, warm space** for families—particularly those with small children—was widely emphasized. Skibbereen and Castlehaven & Myross both urged more

visible signs of inclusion during Mass (e.g., blessings at communion, not judging noisy children). There were calls for meet-and-greet spaces, quiet areas in the church, and clear efforts to reduce any feelings of alienation.

4. Involvement of Children in Mass and Parish Life

Parishes widely recognized the importance of **visible roles for children**, such as altar serving, bringing up gifts, and participating in readings. **Kilmacabea and Skibbereen** especially encouraged the idea of involving children in order to foster early engagement and to reinforce their place in the faith community.

5. Follow-up and Continued Engagement

Several parishes recommended not only preparation but also **ongoing support after baptism**. Castlehaven & Myross particularly advocated for a post-baptism network or community group. **Rath and the Islands** suggested maintaining family engagement through early school years, seeing this as crucial to sustained participation.

6. Ceremony During Mass

Holding the baptism during regular Sunday Mass was widely suggested, reflecting a desire to make the rite a **shared community event**. All five parishes supported this idea to varying degrees, with Castlehaven & Myross showing the most consistent emphasis on this point.

7. Faith Education and Catechesis

Educational components were seen as essential. Parishes like **Kilmacabea and Castlehaven & Myross** advocated for refreshed catechesis for parents, suggesting that the faith literacy of many parents may be outdated or superficial. Some responses proposed thought-provoking questions as part of the application process to stimulate reflection.

8. Practical Suggestions

From logistical needs like **cry rooms and child-friendly spaces** to simple gestures like offering coffee after Mass, many parishes highlighted **practical measures** that could make families feel more at home. Skibbereen and Kilmacabea were particularly detailed in suggesting spatial and social improvements.

9. Delaying Baptism Until Older

Though not dominant, the idea of **delaying baptism** until a child can understand the commitment was raised in **Aughadown and Castlehaven & Myross**, citing the potential for greater personal engagement with the faith later in life.

10. Support Groups and Social Connections

Some responses highlighted the value of **peer support for parents**, such as forming new parent groups or monthly social gatherings. This theme appeared most often in **Castlehaven & Myross, Kilmacabea, and Skibbereen**, reflecting an awareness of modern parenting challenges and the need for social integration alongside spiritual formation.

Conclusion

Overall, the feedback reveals a strong desire across the Skibbereen parishes to revitalize the sacrament of Baptism as a dynamic, participatory, and ongoing entry into faith. While approaches vary slightly by parish, there is a shared commitment to making Baptism not merely a ceremonial milestone, but the first step into a lifelong journey within a nurturing and vibrant Christian community.

B. On the Eucharist:

1. Intentional Preparation by Both Clergy and Laity

There is a strong call for **greater intentionality in how both priests and parishioners prepare for the Eucharist**. Suggestions include reflective time before Mass, formation opportunities, and increased reverence. Preparation isn't limited to ritual details but extends to understanding Scripture and the Eucharistic mystery more deeply.

2. Greater Participation of Laity in the Liturgy

Across multiple parishes, there is a clear emphasis on **active roles for lay people**, such as readers, musicians, prayer leaders, and gift bearers. Inclusion in visible ministries fosters a stronger sense of ownership and mission, especially for children and youth.

3. Homilies That Inspire and Connect

A common theme is the **desire for homilies that are relevant, brief, and spiritually nourishing**. Parishioners expressed a need for preaching that speaks to modern life while helping them internalize the message of the Gospel in a way that compels them to witness to others.

4. A Welcoming and Joyful Atmosphere

Many suggestions focus on creating a **warmer, more welcoming experience**, especially for families, newcomers, and those returning to the Church. Simple actions like a friendly greeting, follow-up after Mass, or a designated "welcoming team" were seen as ways to ensure people feel included and encouraged.

5. Music and Liturgy That Elevate

There is appreciation for **music that enhances the liturgy**, making it uplifting and prayerful. This includes involving choirs, musicians, and children to foster joy and unity. Good music is considered a key component in making the Eucharist a truly nourishing celebration.

6. Post-Mass Engagement and Community-Building

Parishes highlight the importance of **gatherings after Mass**, such as tea/coffee or chat spaces, to deepen bonds among parishioners. These encounters are seen as extensions of the Eucharist, where fellowship nurtures faith and mission.

7. Catechesis and Understanding the Mass

There is concern that many Catholics **lack a deep understanding of the Eucharist**. Several parishes suggest adult faith formation, children's liturgies, and refresher courses to help parishioners grasp the significance of what they celebrate every Sunday.

8. Inclusivity Across Age and Background

Efforts to **make Mass accessible and meaningful for children, teenagers, and busy families** were frequently mentioned. Creating child-friendly Mass settings and roles for youth helps form the next generation of active Catholics.

9. Link Between Eucharist and Evangelisation

Some responses stressed the need to **reconnect Eucharistic celebration with the Church's mission**—that being nourished by the Body of Christ should naturally lead to sharing Christ with others in word and action.

10. Physical and Spiritual Space for Encounter

Suggestions included having a **quiet space for prayer**, setting up meaningful visual symbols, or even designating spaces for children to participate more freely without disruption. These small, tangible changes aim to deepen engagement with the sacred.

Conclusion

Across all parishes, there is a shared yearning for the Sunday Eucharist to be more than a routine obligation. Parishioners envision a celebration that is **transformative, participative, and mission-oriented**—one that not only feeds the soul but compels joyful witness in everyday life.

C. On the Families of Parishes.

Thematic Summary of Responses

1. Sense of Community and Belonging

All parishes emphasized the importance of **preserving a strong local identity** while finding ways to build bridges across the newly joined communities. There was appreciation for the opportunity to share resources and ministries, but a caution against losing the unique character of each parish.

- **Skibbereen** and **Kilmacabea** spoke of strengthening community through common social and liturgical events.
- **Castlehaven & Myross** highlighted that parishioners need reassurance they still belong and matter.

2. Leadership and Collaboration

A major theme was the **need for shared leadership** and clear communication between priests and parishioners. There is a desire for both **pastoral teams** and **lay leadership groups** to take on roles in planning, catechesis, and outreach.

- **Rath and the Islands** and **Castlehaven & Myross** advocated for a parish pastoral council with representation from all parishes.
- **Aughadown** suggested strong coordination among priests and possible lay coordinators.

3. Communication and Clarity

Many parishes requested **transparent, accessible communication** to explain changes and decisions clearly. A unified newsletter, shared calendar of Mass times and events, and opportunities to ask questions were frequently recommended.

- **Skibbereen** suggested centralizing communication online and in bulletins.
- **Kilmacabea** mentioned that confusion and misinformation must be avoided early.

4. Faith Development and Evangelisation

There is a shared belief that Families of Parishes should **reignite a sense of mission**, encouraging spiritual growth and outreach.

- **Castlehaven & Myross** highlighted adult catechesis and formation.
- **Skibbereen** and **Rath and the Islands** emphasized youth engagement and family faith events.

5. Sacramental Life and Liturgy

Parishes want assurance that **sacramental celebrations remain meaningful and locally rooted**. Suggestions included sharing resources (e.g. choirs, readers) across parishes, but retaining familiar formats and faces when possible.

- Several parishes (including **Aughadown**) supported rotating Masses among churches but stressed predictability and consistency.

6. Inclusion and Participation

A common concern was ensuring that **no one feels left out** in the transition. Elderly, newcomers, or infrequent attendees need intentional outreach.

- **Skibbereen** and **Castlehaven & Myross** emphasized hospitality ministries and welcome teams.

7. Practical and Logistical Challenges

Issues such as priest availability, travel between churches, and scheduling emerged as real concerns. Respondents stressed the importance of **pragmatic planning**, including coordinated calendars, transportation help, and clear schedules.

- **Kilmacabea** and **Rath** stressed realistic expectations for what one priest can do.

Comparative summary by parish

Theme	Skibbereen	Castlehaven & Myross	Rath & the Islands	Aughadown	Kilmacabea
Sense of belonging	Strong emphasis	Strong	Moderate	Concerned	Strong
Shared leadership	Moderate	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Moderate
Communication clarity	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Strong
Evangelisation & catechesis	Moderate	Strong	Moderate	Low	Moderate
Liturgy & sacraments	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Strong	Moderate
Inclusion & welcome	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Practical logistics	Moderate	Moderate	Strong	Strong	Strong

Conclusion

This family of parishes is approaching the Families of Parishes model with cautious optimism. The major themes that emerge are a desire for collaboration without loss of local identity, greater transparency, and strong lay involvement. While some worry about logistical burdens and diminished pastoral presence, many also see this as a chance for renewal—liturgically, pastorally, and communally.