

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 Ballincollig, Ballinora, Kilmurry and Ovens & Farran.

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.

On Baptism:-

1. Celebrate Baptism Publicly within the Community

All four parishes emphasize that **baptism should be made more visible and communal**, not isolated or private.

- **Ballincollig and Ovens & Farran:** Strongly advocate for **baptisms during Sunday Mass**, especially family or children's Masses.
- **Ballinora:** Suggests using the **Feast of the Baptism of the Lord** to gather and bless families who had children baptised that year.
- **Kilmurry:** Notes the value of aligning baptism with Mass times and community schedules.

 *Insight:* **Making baptism public and joyful** helps link the sacrament to parish identity and invites broader involvement.

2. Support, Prepare, and Follow Up with Families

All four parishes stress the need for **ongoing engagement with families**, not just a one-time preparation session.

- **Ballincollig:** Recommends **personal outreach, family-friendly groups, and spiritual and practical preparation.**

- **Ovens & Farran:** Proposes follow-up gatherings, baptised-child announcements, and **monthly Masses for newly baptised families.**
- **Ballinora and Kilmurry:** Suggest parents should be personally invited back to Mass and provided with encouragement and space.

 *Insight:* Baptism must lead to a **relationship with the parish** — before, during, and long after the ceremony.

3. Welcome Families and Children in Practical Ways

Creating a **child-friendly and non-judgmental atmosphere** at Mass is a major theme:

- **All four parishes** mention:
 - Dedicated **children’s or family Masses.**
 - Rooms or **quiet spaces for parents and toddlers.**
 - Reminders from priests that **children’s noise is welcome.**
- **Ovens & Farran:** Suggests **giving children drawing activities** tied to the liturgy and **offering affirmations from the altar.**

 *Insight:* Families return when they feel **relaxed, accepted, and included** — even when babies cry or toddlers fidget.

4. Engage Parents and Godparents in Real Formation

Several parishes express concern that **many parents lack understanding of the sacrament:**

- **Ballincollig:** Suggests an **adult religious formation programme** alongside sacramental prep.
- **Kilmurry:** Emphasizes **education about faith and sacraments** as essential for re-engaging lapsed or uncertain families.
- **Ovens & Farran:** Encourages spiritual conversations and tailoring preparation to individual parents’ lives and needs.

 *Insight:* Good formation helps shift baptism from a **cultural obligation** to a **deliberate faith commitment.**

5. Make Baptism the First Step in a Lifelong Journey

Several parishes reflect on how to **connect baptism to wider parish life and future sacraments**:

- **Ballincollig**: Proposes ideas like a **family book or register**, home blessings, and **revisiting the baptismal candle**.
- **Ovens & Farran**: Recommends **reminding families to commemorate baptism anniversaries** and **keep telling the story**.
- **Ballinora**: Notes that baptism often serves as a re-entry point — an **opportunity to rekindle faith** in inactive families.

 *Insight*: Baptism can ignite a **faith narrative** — but the faith community must help families continue the story.

Summary Table

Theme	Ballincollig	Ballinora	Kilmurry	Ovens & Farran
Public/community celebration of baptism	✔ Family Mass, readings, music	✔ Annual Mass on Baptism of the Lord	✔ Tie baptisms to regular Mass	✔ Monthly baptisms, name blessings
Ongoing support for families	✔ Coffee mornings, toddler support	✔ Invitation after baptism	✔ Prior contact, practical help	✔ Follow-ups, reminders, Mass mentions
Welcoming families/children at Mass	✔ Quiet spaces, inclusive tone	✔ Reduce shame over noise	✔ Encourage presence of children	✔ Dedicated spaces, affirmations
Formation of parents/godparents	✔ Adult faith programme, prep group	◆ Baptism team suggested	✔ Education about sacraments	✔ Tailored meetings, conversation
Connecting baptism to lifelong journey	✔ Candle symbolism, home blessings	✔ Entry point back to faith	✔ Visit cribs, reflection prompts	✔ Remember anniversaries, family record

✔ = Strong emphasis | ◆ = Mentioned or implied

Final Reflection

These four parishes reflect a pastoral creativity grounded in practical hospitality. The consensus is clear: to make baptism a gateway, the parish must walk with the family, not just welcome them once. It’s about celebration, formation, connection, and consistency.

On the Eucharist:-

◆ 1. Youth Involvement as a Means of Formation and Evangelisation

All parishes emphasize the need to involve young people more actively in the Mass. This includes roles like readings, music, offertory, and prayers of the faithful. Several propose youth-specific Masses and creative expressions (art, drama, music).

Parish	Approach
Ballincollig	Broad youth engagement in choir, music lessons, readings, planning Mass.
Ballinora	Encouragement in liturgical roles like reading and collecting.
Kilmurry	Youth involved through music, artwork, and school participation.
Ovens & Farran	Regular folk/youth Masses, involvement in all aspects of liturgy.

◆ 2. Deepening Spiritual Preparation for All

There is a strong call for prayerful, intentional preparation for Sunday Mass by both clergy and laity. This includes reflection on readings, Lectio Divina, and openness to spiritual formation.

Parish	Approach
Ballincollig	Scripture reading in advance, Lectio Divina, spiritual reflection.
Ballinora	Emphasis on internal readiness—clearing the heart and mind.
Kilmurry	Faith education through service and formation for young and old.
Ovens & Farran	Reflective practices, catechesis on liturgical symbols.

◆ 3. Community Building Before and After Mass

Mass is seen not only as liturgy but as an opportunity to strengthen communal ties. Suggestions include post-Mass tea, coffee mornings, and community service.

Parish	Approach
Ballincollig	Coffee mornings, social reflection, school partnerships.
Ballinora	Less emphasis, but values participation as a form of connection.
Kilmurry	Service to housebound, prayer outreach, community integration.
Ovens & Farran	Hospitality after Mass, parish celebration, children's liturgy groups.

◆ 4. Welcome, Inclusion and Participation

Mass should be an inclusive, joyful experience. Emphasis is placed on visible welcome, participation across all age groups, and valuing each person's presence.

Parish	Approach
Ballincollig	Welcoming greeters, youth handing out missals, inclusive language.
Ballinora	More implicit—focused on respectful participation.
Kilmurry	Service as a sign of welcome; involvement as invitation.
Ovens & Farran	Extensive: smiles, help with mobility, greeting people warmly.

◆ 5. Music, Liturgy and Homily: Enhancing Participation

Joyful music, relevant and engaging homilies, and full participation in the liturgy were universally mentioned as crucial to spiritual nourishment and missionary strength.

Parish	Approach
Ballincollig	Trained musicians, coordinated music, psalms sung, relevant homilies.
Ballinora	Mass as experience: tone, rhythm, silence, presence.
Kilmurry	Strong musical involvement from young people and school.
Ovens & Farran	Joyful music, storytelling homilies, youth liturgies.

◆ 6. Formation Beyond the Mass: Adult Faith & Ongoing Catechesis

Many comments stressed that to tell others about Christ, parishioners need ongoing adult formation, catechesis, and resources to grow in their own faith.

Parish	Approach
Ballincollig	Lectio Divina, study groups, spiritual reflection groups.
Ballinora	Encouragement to live the gospel through action.
Kilmurry	Faith development through community service and daily practices.
Ovens & Farran	Adult formation, symbolic catechesis (e.g., vestments, gestures).

Insights and Implications

- **Mass as Mission:** All four parishes understand Mass not as an end in itself, but as a place of spiritual renewal and commissioning.
- **Youth Engagement is Crucial:** The vitality of youth involvement is universally acknowledged and seen as both a pastoral and evangelical priority.
- **Welcome is a Ministry:** Greeting, inclusion, and hospitality are no longer optional but central to liturgical life and evangelisation.

- **Faith Must Be Lived and Shared:** Every parish identifies the need to link the Eucharist to everyday witness — in school, home, service, and society.
- **Joyful Expression Matters:** From music to post-Mass conversation, joyful, visible celebration strengthens participation and outreach.

On the Families of Parishes:-

1. Support Received from the Family of Parishes

- **Ballincollig** noted regular shared prayer meetings and rotating priests. While some appreciated the sense of connection, others were unsure about the impact, pointing to limited engagement.
 - **Ballinora** appreciated having access to priests from other parishes when needed.
 - **Kilmurry** emphasized the vital support received during priest shortages. They are new to the current family and are still in the early stages of integration.
 - **Ovens & Farran** experienced practical benefits like shared Masses, community events, and prayer meetings that strengthened parish ties.
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2. How Each Parish Supports the Family of Parishes

- **Ballincollig** contributes through pastoral council efforts, clergy relief, and organizing inclusive events. There's a strong focus on communication and prayer gatherings.
 - **Ballinora** participates in organizing and attending events, aiming to stay active within the group.
 - **Kilmurry** expressed that previous limitations made it difficult to contribute, but they're optimistic about future growth.
 - **Ovens & Farran** supports through hospitality, priest sharing, choir participation, and idea exchange.
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3. Challenges Since Joining the Family of Parishes

- **Ballincollig** cited public confusion about the model, a loss of community due to rotating clergy, and the strain on priests.
 - **Ballinora** found the adjustment to different priests a challenge.
 - **Kilmurry** faced major disruptions from having no resident priest and difficulties forming meaningful connections due to location and past structures.
 - **Ovens & Farran** struggled with adapting to a lay-led model, changes to traditional Mass times, and encouraging inter-parish participation.
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4. Celebrating Sacramental Life as a Family

- **Ballincollig** supported joint liturgies, rotating sacramental celebrations, and cross-parish newsletters to build awareness.
- **Ballinora** favored participation across all parishes.
- **Kilmurry** recommended collaborative liturgical planning and realistic expectations based on resources.
- **Ovens & Farran** proposed family-themed events, bishop visits, and retreats, as well as rotating Masses and stronger inter-ministry cooperation.

5. Encouraging Youth Participation

- **Ballincollig** highlighted the success of Alpha for youth, involving children in Mass, and forming a youth choir across parishes.
 - **Ballinora** emphasized listening to young people's preferences and inviting their input.
 - **Kilmurry** pointed to parental example and inter-parish opportunities for youth to connect, including school involvement and diocesan events.
 - **Ovens & Farran** focused on making liturgy relevant to youth, encouraging their involvement in music and readings, and celebrating them during key life moments.
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6. Supporting Parish Ministries

- **Ballincollig** called for more training, scriptural education, shared guidelines, and spiritual development through retreats.
 - **Ballinora** echoed the need for training and refreshers.
 - **Kilmurry** looked to more experienced parishes for mentorship and proposed regular meetings to share best practices.
 - **Ovens & Farran** emphasized visibility, ongoing training, and cross-parish collaboration to attract new ministry members.
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7. Hopes for the Next 5–10 Years

- **Ballincollig** envisioned strong lay leadership, unified pastoral councils, and social activities fostering a shared identity while preserving church presence.
- **Ballinora** hoped for sustained individuality within a collaborative framework, with increased lay involvement.
- **Kilmurry** acknowledged uncertainties but emphasized the need for committed laity and growing collaboration.
- **Ovens & Farran** hoped for a dynamic, inclusive family with more roles for women, better support for priests, and youth-driven ministry renewal.