

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 Clontead, Courceys, Ballinhassig and Kinsale.

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 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.

A. On Baptism:-

1. Baptism as a Gateway vs. an Entry Point Already

- **Ballinhassig** included a theological assertion: "*Baptism is not merely a gateway but automatic incorporation into the Church.*" This view reminds us of the doctrinal understanding of Baptism as a change affecting the whole person. However, other responses stress the need for follow-up to *actualize* the communal potential of that change.
- Several parishes (e.g. **Clontead, Kinsale**) reflect on how to make the *impact* of baptism real and ongoing through formation, education, and follow-up.

2. Preparation and Formation

- All four parishes strongly advocate for **pre-baptismal preparation** for parents (and sometimes godparents). This includes:
 - **Catechesis** and explanation of baptismal symbols and responsibilities.
 - **Multiple meetings** rather than a one-off session (Clontead, Kinsale).
 - **Spiritual emphasis** – not just practical information (Ballinhassig, Kinsale).
- Kinsale and Clontead stress the need for **adult formation and dialogue**, pointing out that understanding and openness is often lacking.

3. Post-Baptism Follow-Up

- Most parishes proposed mechanisms to **sustain contact after baptism**:
 - **Annual gatherings** or **special Masses** for recently baptised families (Ballinhassig, Kinsale, Courceys).
 - Periodic events that encourage parents to bring children back (e.g., "Happy Birthday Baby Jesus" Mass – Kinsale).

- Clontead suggested **group baptisms followed by community celebrations** to forge connections.

4. Welcoming, Inclusion, and Community Support

- All parishes express a desire for greater **inclusivity**:
 - **Visiting families in their homes** (Clontead, Kinsale).
 - Creating **welcoming, child-friendly church environments** (buggy space, visual aids, tolerance for noise).
 - Acknowledging **life challenges**, time constraints, and the pressures families face (e.g., Ballinhassig's point on Sunday sport clashes).

5. Baptism Within Mass

- **Baptising during Sunday Mass** is widely supported (Ballinhassig, Clontead, Courceys) as a way to:
 - Connect the sacrament with the larger **worshipping community**.
 - Allow public **recognition and welcome** of the child and family.

6. Bridging the Baptism–Communion Gap

- Many see a critical **gap between Baptism and First Communion** where no structured engagement exists.
 - **Suggestions include**: parent and toddler groups, prayer events, and catechesis sessions.
 - Courceys expressed concern about the role of **schools in sacramental preparation**, questioning whether the current model is sufficient or effective.

Noteworthy Insights

- **Clontead** raises a rare but thought-provoking idea: reconsidering the *age* of baptism. This echoes a growing trend in some theological circles around adult/older child initiation.
- **Kinsale** emphasized **transparency, openness, and modern communication**, reflecting awareness of cultural distrust or disconnection from the Church.
- **Courceys** draws attention to **intergenerational faith transmission**, particularly the role of grandparents.

Summary of Emerging Trends Across These Parishes

Theme	Emphasis
Pre-baptismal formation	Strong (theological, spiritual, and practical)
Baptism during Mass	Widely supported
Follow-up with families	Prioritized through Masses, social events
Community welcome and support	Child-friendly spaces, informal events, home visits

Theme	Emphasis
Role of family in faith formation	Highlighted (especially parents and grandparents)
Critique of school-based formation	Noted concern in 2 parishes

Conclusion

These four parishes reflect a shared conviction that **baptism must be more than a ritual—it must be a relational and spiritual entry into ongoing life in the Church.** The central challenge is not the rite itself, but the **systems and culture of accompaniment, welcome, and formation** that the parish creates around it. Their suggestions present a strong case for an integrated approach combining **preparation, visibility, community building, and follow-through.**

B. On the Eucharist

1. Youth Engagement

Common Trend: All four parishes emphasize involving children and young people in the Mass to ensure future participation and understanding.

- **Ballinhassig:** Proposes child-friendly Masses and materials; encourages children's roles in readings, music, and rituals especially before First Communion/Confirmation.
- **Clontead:** Suggests direct engagement through schools; emphasizes understanding the Eucharist and participation through readings, prayers, and music.
- **Courceys:** Emphasizes young altar servers, readers, and musicians; wants to retain young people's involvement post-Confirmation.
- **Kinsale:** Recommends Youth Masses, involving youth in specific roles and ensuring relevance of Mass through appropriate messaging.

Contrast: Kinsale links youth engagement with broader cultural trends and competition (e.g., sports), suggesting differentiated Masses by age group, while Ballinhassig focuses more on sacramental preparation.

2. Liturgical Preparation and Participation

Common Trend: Strong encouragement for lay preparation and involvement before and during Mass.

- **Ballinhassig:** Promotes well-prepared ministers, music suited to liturgical seasons, and educating on Mass symbols.
- **Clontead:** Recommends pre-Mass reading groups, post-Mass parish meetings, and lay homilies; pushes for more shared leadership.

- **Courceys:** Highlights meaningful silence during Mass, altar servers, and symbolic gestures like bell ringing.
- **Kinsale:** Supports tailored homilies and feedback, clearly structured homilies, and participation in all aspects of liturgy.

Contrast: Clontead shows the most progressive suggestions (e.g., lay homilists, women priests), while Ballinhassig and Courceys focus more on traditional roles and symbolic elements.

3. Music and Atmosphere

Common Trend: Music is seen as vital for spiritual uplift and participation.

- **Ballinhassig:** Concerned about aging choirs and lack of new organists; suggests diocese-level training for cantors.
- **Clontead:** Advocates for festive atmosphere—music, singing, and even fun; makes Mass joyful and inclusive.
- **Courceys:** Stresses the solemnity and emotional resonance of silence and music during key moments like the Consecration.
- **Kinsale:** Suggests music as a unifying force, encouraging silence before Mass and singing that complements liturgical themes.

Contrast: Clontead is more experimental and festive; Courceys and Kinsale place more emphasis on reverence and solemnity.

4. Relevance and Catechesis

Common Trend: The need for deeper catechesis and clearer messaging to enrich understanding and application of the faith.

- **Ballinhassig:** Points to declining understanding of the Mass and recommends targeted catechesis and support for priests.
- **Clontead:** Strong on education through catechesis, discussion, and community reflection; critical of passive attendance.
- **Courceys:** Advocates reminders of liturgical symbolism and encourages homilies that provide take-home lessons.
- **Kinsale:** Stresses need for homilies to be relatable and focused, and for the Mass to foster pride and reflection on the mystery of the Eucharist.

Contrast: Clontead calls for systemic liturgical reform and deeper community reflection; Ballinhassig focuses on structural catechesis and diocesan support.

5. Community and Hospitality

Common Trend: Building community and being welcoming is repeatedly mentioned as critical to evangelization and retention.

- **Ballinhassig:** Suggests family events and connections through music and prayer.
- **Clontead:** Encourages dialogue, festivals, post-Mass activities, and inclusive participation.
- **Courceys:** Emphasizes shared silence, familial involvement in Mass, and inclusion during key rituals.
- **Kinsale:** Highlights greetings, inclusion in liturgical roles, and the importance of feeling at home in the church.

Contrast: Clontead offers the most comprehensive model for community-building, including visual aids, family rituals, and broader lay involvement.

Summary Table

Theme	Ballinhassig	Clontead	Courceys	Kinsale
Youth Involvement	Mass prep & music roles	Active school/parish link	Post-Confirmation inclusion	Youth Masses, symbolic acts
Liturgical Prep	Focus on clarity & symbols	Catechesis, lay homilies	Silence, meaningful rituals	Homily focus, relevance
Music	Cantor training needed	Joyful & festive music focus	Solemnity with choirs	Music to connect & uplift
Catechesis	Sacrament understanding	Liturgical education deeply	Symbol reminder in homilies	Faith education through Mass
Community	Family Masses, gatherings	Parish festivals, open forum	Involving families in Mass	Post-Mass greetings, unity

C. On the Families of Parishes

1. Support Received from the Family of Parishes

All five parishes primarily benefit from the **sharing of priests**. This has allowed for:

- Continuity of **Masses and sacraments** during holidays and illness (Ballinhassig, Clontead, Kinsale, Courceys).
- Some mention of **shared leadership and reflection** among clergy (Clontead). However, a few parishes (Clontead, Kinsale) express **low visibility or unclear impact** of the Family of Parishes at the lay level.

2. How Parishes Are Contributing

- **Priestly sharing** is the most common contribution (Ballinhassig, Clontead, Kinsale).
- **Flexibility with Mass times** to facilitate cover is noted by several (Ballinhassig, Clontead).
- Participation in **planning and discussions** is more active in Kinsale and Clontead, though visibility is still limited in some areas.
- **Courceys** highlights welcoming and attending Family-wide workshops.

3. Challenges Encountered

All parishes report:

- **Mass reductions and time changes**, often inconvenient for parishioners.
- **Diminished parish identity** or concerns about **loss of autonomy** (Clontead, Courceys).
- **Communication gaps** are especially noted in Clontead and Kinsale, with some parishioners unsure about decisions or direction.

4. Celebrating Sacramental Life Together

- Joint sacramental celebrations like **shared Reconciliation services, festivals, or novenas** are suggested (Ballinhassig, Clontead, Kinsale).
- Some parishes (Courceys) highlight the importance of such shared liturgies in reducing priest workload.
- There is still **uncertainty** and a **lack of specific plans** in parishes like Ballinhassig.

5. Encouraging Youth Involvement

This remains a **key concern**:

- All parishes acknowledge the **difficulty engaging youth**.
- Strategies include **youth Masses, social events, using modern communication platforms**, and involving youth in **liturgical roles** (Clontead, Kinsale).
- **Ballinhassig** mentions hiring catechists and improving school-parish links.
- **Courceys** notes the challenge of rural demographics limiting youth numbers.

6. Supporting Ministries

Common needs:

- **Training and lay formation** are universally highlighted as urgent needs (all five parishes).
- Emphasis on **peer support**, communication, and **cross-parish collaboration** (Clontead, Ballinhassig, Kinsale).
- **Ballinhassig and Clontead** call for structured lay formation and leadership development.
- **Courceys** values **shared ministry days** like altar server events.

7. Hopes for the Future (5–10 Years)

Across all parishes, there's a shared hope for:

- **More lay leadership** as priest numbers decline.
- **Sustainable parish life** even with fewer clergy and fewer Masses.
- **Increased collaboration** across parishes and **welcoming communities**.
Some additional hopes:
- **Kinsale** urges leadership formation and calls for structural reform and inclusion.
- **Clontead** calls for clear communication, transparency, and empowerment of parishioners.
- **Ballinhassig** foresees the need for support “hubs” and stronger lay involvement.
- **Courceys** wants faster action on lay-led services.