

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 Bantry, Caheragh, Goleen, Muintir Bháire and Schull.

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. Baptism as a Gift, Not Just a Ceremony

Across all five parishes, there is deep appreciation of **Baptism as a profound sacrament**, not just a cultural or social event:

- **Bantry, Caheragh, and Muintir Bháire** stress that baptism is **spiritual initiation**, a sacred gift, and the **foundation of the Christian journey**.
- **Goleen and Schull** emphasize the theological aspect — that baptism opens the door to grace and the sacraments.

 *Insight:* A recurring concern is that families see baptism as **a day out**, not a commitment — leading to calls for more **teaching and formation**.

2. Pre-Baptism Preparation and Education for Parents

Most parishes emphasize the importance of **formation and instruction before baptism**:

- **Caheragh and Muintir Bháire:** Propose **structured pre-baptism preparation**, including online or group sessions, mirroring pre-marriage or prenatal courses.
- **Bantry:** Raises critical questions about **whether parents and godparents understand the depth of the commitment**.
- **Goleen:** Underscores living out baptismal promises as a response to Christ's saving work.

 *Insight:* Clear desire for **faith formation before baptism** — not to exclude families, but to help them take the moment seriously.

3. Involving Families After Baptism

These parishes agree that **follow-up after the baptism day is essential:**


- **Caheragh** and **Muintir Bháire:** Suggest celebrating **baptism anniversaries** — like birthdays — as a reminder of grace.
- **Bantry** and **Muintir Bháire:** Call for **ongoing support**, like contact with parents or offering Masses for recently baptised children.

 *Insight:* One-time rituals become **gateways** when there's a **bridge to ongoing connection**.

4. Supportive, Non-Judgmental Parish Culture

Several responses reflect on how to create a **welcoming atmosphere for returning or hesitant families:**


- **Caheragh:** Emphasizes **not judging** parents who haven't been active in the Church.
- **Bantry:** Suggests simply **celebrating with those who come**, rather than worrying about making baptism into something entertaining.
- **Muintir Bháire:** Encourages churches to **emphasize gratitude, not pressure** — focus on prayer and practice over judgment.

 *Insight:* Grace is best nurtured when we **meet people where they are**, not where we wish they were.

5. Child Engagement and Parish Participation

While adult preparation is emphasized, **children's role in church life** is also addressed:

- **Caheragh** and **Muintir Bháire:** Recommend **altar service, choir, and Sunday school** for young children.
- **Schull:** Notes that baptism leads to the **ability to receive all other sacraments** — and that this should be part of the message families hear.

 *Insight:* Baptism is a **starting line**, not a finish — include children visibly in the faith community after they're baptised.

Summary Table

Theme	Bantry	Caheragh	Goleen	Muintir Bháire	Schull
Baptism as sacred gift	✔ Strong emphasis	✔ Strong emphasis	✔ Theological focus	✔ Strong emphasis	✔ Noted clearly
Pre-baptism formation for parents	✔ Critical reflection	✔ Online/group classes	◆ Implied through living faith	✔ Structured preparation	◆ Not emphasized
Follow-up after baptism	✔ Invite, celebrate	✔ Anniversary Mass/cards	◆ Not mentioned	✔ Anniversary link, ongoing support	◆ Not mentioned
Welcoming tone and culture	✔ Accept all who come	✔ Don't judge absentees	✔ Faithfulness encouraged	✔ Emphasize grace, not guilt	◆ Not mentioned
Child/family engagement post-baptism	◆ Implied	✔ Choir, altar service	◆ Not mentioned	✔ Prayer at home, child inclusion	✔ Leads to other sacraments

✔ = Strong emphasis | ◆ = Mentioned or implied



Notable Innovations

- **Caheragh's** comparison to **prenatal and marriage prep** as a model for baptism formation is especially practical and adaptable.
- **Bantry's** open-ended reflection — “How can we make baptism anything?” — serves as a **spiritual challenge** to focus less on control and more on **welcoming grace**.
- **Muintir Bháire's** description of baptism as **spiritual food** for a lifelong journey is a powerful image for catechesis.

Reflection

These parishes approach the question with deep reverence. Their collective message: Baptism already is the gateway — the challenge is whether we treat it that way. Preparation, welcome, follow-up, and visible engagement are the supports that hold open that gateway.

On the Eucharist:-

1. Active Participation of Laity

- A consistent emphasis across all five parishes is the need for more lay participation in various roles:
 - Readers, Ministers of the Eucharist (Schull, Caheragh, Goleen)
 - Altar servers and choirs, especially encouraging young people (Muintir Bháire, Caheragh, Schull)
 - Welcoming ministers at the church doors (Schull, Caheragh)
 - Lay-led preparations such as reading groups and prayer (Bantry, Muintir Bháire)

2. Inclusion of Children and Youth

- Nearly all parishes emphasize getting children and youth involved:
 - Youth choirs, music groups (Caheragh, Muintir Bháire, Goleen)
 - Children's Masses, Sunday school, simplified readings (Muintir Bháire, Caheragh)
 - Suggestions to delay sacraments until children are more aware (Caheragh)

3. Community and Welcome

- The value of making Mass a more communal and joyful experience is underlined:
 - Coffee/tea after Mass (Bantry, Caheragh)
 - Warm welcomes at the door (Schull, Caheragh)
 - Public acknowledgment and encouragement for participation (Caheragh)

4. Music and Singing

- All parishes stress the power of music:
 - Regular choir and cantor participation improves engagement (Goleen, Schull)
 - Importance of uplifting music and singing for congregational participation (Muintir Bháire, Caheragh)

5. Homily and Liturgy

- The need for clear, engaging, and relevant homilies is mentioned:
 - Encouragement of good preaching (Bantry, Muintir Bháire)
 - Make liturgy understandable and stories accessible, especially for children (Caheragh, Bantry)

6. Technology and Accessibility

- Caheragh highlights modern solutions:
 - Use of screens for hymn lyrics and prayers
 - Better sound systems and visual aids
 - Digital media to reach families

7. Spiritual Formation and Reverence

- Calls for deeper preparation and reverence:
 - Lectio Divina, regular rosary, and prayerful reflection (Bantry, Muintir Bháire, Caheragh)
 - Maintaining solemnity, especially at the Eucharist (Goleen, Bantry)

PARISH COMPARISON

Parish	Lay Involvement	Youth Focus	Music & Choir	Community Events	Spiritual Depth	Technology Use
Bantry	High	Medium	Medium	High	High	Low
Caheragh	Very High	Very High	High	Very High	High	High
Muintir Bháire	High	High	High	Medium	High	Low
Schull	Medium	High	High	Medium	Medium	Low
Goleen	Medium	Low	High	Low	Medium	Low

CONTRASTS

- **Bantry** shows a deep theological and spiritual reflection, emphasizing inner transformation through the Eucharist. However, it presents less practical or structured suggestions.
- **Caheragh** stands out for its comprehensive vision involving community, youth engagement, music, and technological tools to enhance liturgy and catechesis.
- **Muintir Bháire** focuses on practical involvement of children and families, with strong support for clergy and a call for community-based catechesis.
- **Schull** centers its vision around family, intergenerational faith practice, and sacramental continuity, especially encouraging participation of children and youth.
- **Goleen** underscores the reverent and solemn celebration of Mass, highlighting the importance of high-quality music and trained cantors as key to spiritual nourishment.

SUMMARY

Together, these five parishes emphasize a shared desire to:

- Build vibrant, intergenerational, and participative communities
- Deepen reverence and understanding of the Eucharist
- Use music, inclusion, and community engagement as tools to make Mass more alive and transformative

On the Families of Parishes

1. Support Received from the Family of Parishes

- **Bantry:** Appreciated the variety of priests and shared communications like newsletters; noted limited visible change in everyday experience.
 - **Caheragh:** Valued priest sharing and regular meetings; expressed appreciation for Mass continuity.
 - **Muintir Bháire:** Positive about rotating priests, online Mass, and the Parish Office's support.
 - **Schull:** Grateful for continued access to sacraments and weekly Mass, and praised effective communication through newsletters.
 - **Goleen:** Saw tangible support via newsletters and shared priest travel for Masses.
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2. How Each Parish Supports the Family of Parishes

- **Bantry:** Participates in ministries, financially supports the structure, and serves centrally as a hub.
 - **Caheragh:** Active in choir and altar service; engages through regular meetings.
 - **Muintir Bháire:** Support expressed through appreciation, attending ceremonies elsewhere, and financial contributions.
 - **Schull:** Involved by attending services and helping where possible.
 - **Goleen:** Offers financial support and engages in shared experiences (though with limited detail).
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3. Challenges Since Joining the Family of Parishes

- **Bantry:** Struggles with reduced priest presence, declining attendance, and less Mass availability.
 - **Caheragh:** Felt the loss of regular priest and uncertainty about who is celebrating Mass.
 - **Muintir Bháire:** Noted the difficulty of connecting with rotating priests and lack of local priest presence.
 - **Schull:** Miss consistency of priest assignment; workload on priests is evident.
 - **Goleen:** Highlighted the strain on priests due to cross-parish responsibilities.
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4. Celebrating Sacramental Life as a Family

- **Bantry:** Suggested joint liturgies and evening events but observed little actual change.
- **Caheragh:** Proposed rotating events, more lay involvement, and group prayer initiatives like Lectio Divina.
- **Muintir Bháire:** Preferred local sacramental celebrations but open to joint Communion events.

- **Schull:** Stressed unity in prayer and trust in God; focused on the spiritual value.
 - **Goleen:** Supported shared events such as the Ceremony of Light and World Day of the Sick.
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5. Encouraging Youth Participation

- **Bantry:** Proposed choirs, liturgical arts, and a strong focus on engaging parents.
 - **Caheragh:** Advocated for youth roles in reading, music, and Alpha-style activities.
 - **Muintir Bháire:** Encouraged participation in altar service, choirs, and ongoing post-sacramental roles.
 - **Schull:** Emphasized early encouragement and modeling participation as adults.
 - **Goleen:** Acknowledged a need to rethink engagement strategies—youth may not be connecting with current methods.
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6. Supporting Parish Ministries

- **Bantry:** Called for more interaction among ministers, training, and structured feedback.
 - **Caheragh:** Suggested meetings and mutual encouragement; noted need for more support due to small teams.
 - **Muintir Bháire:** Recommended youth involvement, training, and creation of parish assemblies.
 - **Schull:** Encouraged parental involvement and periodic team meetings to exchange ideas.
 - **Goleen:** Identified recruitment as a major challenge and emphasized formation and peer support.
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7. Vision for the Next 5–10 Years

- **Bantry:** Hopes for greater youth involvement, a deeper faith community, and a move away from bureaucratic models.
- **Caheragh:** Envisions full lay participation, unity across parishes, and youth engagement.
- **Muintir Bháire:** Focuses on retaining weekly Mass and renewing the Church through small, faithful communities.
- **Schull:** Sees lay ministers playing a bigger role and aims for spiritual growth.
- **Goleen:** Anticipates a smaller but strong worshipping community and hopes for continued unity.