

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 Carrigaline, Crosshaven, The Harbour Parishes (Monkstown and Passage West) and Tracton Abbey.

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. Preparation and Catechesis for Parents

Strong, recurring theme across all groups:

- **Carrigaline:** Suggests Alpha-style courses, discernment questions, videos, baptism booklets, and reflection time.
- **Crosshaven:** Emphasizes need to teach what baptism is (not just a naming ceremony).
- **Harbour Parishes:** Proposes 3–4 preparation meetings, explaining baptism's meaning and responsibilities.
- **Tracton Abbey:** Emphasizes information sessions and home visits by priests or baptism teams.

 **Insight:** All four parishes agree that **deepening parents' understanding** is essential to making baptism meaningful, not a “tick-box.”


2. Ongoing Support and Follow-up

- **Carrigaline:** Suggests follow-up home visits, post-baptism gatherings, and toddler groups.
- **Harbour Parishes:** Recommends visits from baptism groups and keeping communication open post-baptism.
- **Tracton Abbey:** Proposes ongoing informal events between baptism and First Communion.
- **Crosshaven:** Suggests social groups, toddler groups, and parent faith-building courses.

 *Insight:* There is consensus that **ongoing connection post-baptism** is key to integrating families into the faith community.


3. Inclusion and Welcome at Mass

- **All four groups** emphasized:
 - **Welcoming families** at Mass (especially if children are noisy or restless).
 - Making Mass **more engaging and interactive** for children.
 - Designating **child-friendly spaces** or offering activities during Mass (e.g., coloring, children's liturgy).

 *Insight:* Churches must **actively normalize and accommodate family life** at Mass, removing shame and awkwardness.

4. Youth and Child Engagement

- **Carrigaline:** Suggests children's choirs, altar servers, kids' activity packs, and visible participation.
- **Crosshaven:** Proposes children's liturgy and cheerful symbols of joy (flowers, candles).
- **Harbour Parishes:** Encourages children to light candles, carry gifts, and attend children's storytelling rooms.
- **Tracton Abbey:** Advocates for baby-friendly Masses and encouraging children's presence at all stages.

 *Insight:* Early involvement of children in the liturgy and parish life helps **sustain the baptismal journey**.

5. Baptism as a Community Event

- **Carrigaline, Crosshaven, Harbour, Tracton Abbey:** All propose celebrating baptism **during Sunday Mass** or as part of the wider parish gathering.
- This helps prevent it from being a **private, family-only ritual**.

 *Insight:* Making baptism **public and communal** helps integrate families into the body of the Church from the start.

6. Digital, Social, and Cultural Outreach

- **Carrigaline:** Emphasizes use of **social media, YouTube**, parish newsletters, and **celebrating other cultures** (e.g., garden parties).

- **Tracton Abbey:** Encourages informal church events and **multi-generational engagement**.
- **Harbour Parishes:** Highlight the need to **coordinate across schools and dioceses**.

 *Insight:* Parishes must **modernize communication and visibility**, making baptism part of a **visible, everyday culture of faith**.

7. The Role of Godparents and Sponsors

- Recognized by all, especially:
 - **Carrigaline:** Suggests educating godparents about their role.
 - **Harbour Parishes:** Proposes liturgies that include godparent testimonies.
 - **Tracton Abbey:** Stresses the symbolic and mentoring role of godparents.

Comparative Summary Table

Theme	Carrigaline	Crosshaven	Harbour Parishes	Tracton Abbey
Parent preparation & education	✓ Extensive	✓ Needed	✓ Strong emphasis	✓ Strong emphasis
Ongoing follow-up post-baptism	✓ Yes	✓ Social groups	✓ Yes	✓ Yes
Child/family welcome at Mass	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	✓ Yes
Children's liturgy/roles	✓ Rich ideas	✓ Creative	✓ Child-friendly zones	✓ Baby Masses
Baptism at Sunday Mass	✓ Preferred	✓ Encouraged	✓ Strongly encouraged	✓ Yes
Digital/social outreach	✓ Strong	◆ Implied	◆ Some	✓ Informal events
Cultural inclusivity	✓ Multicultural	◆ Implied	◆ Implicit	◆ Implied
Role of godparents/sponsors	✓ Training	✓ Important	✓ Liturgical emphasis	✓ Affirmed

✓ = Prominent theme | ◆ = Mentioned or implied

Key Points

1. **Preparation is Key**
Every group identified a need to **reframe baptism as a journey**, not a moment, by better preparing parents and godparents.
2. **Hospitality Must Be Real**
Churches must **remove barriers of noise, awkwardness, or unfamiliarity** to ensure young families feel fully welcomed and wanted.
3. **Post-Baptism Ministry Is Lacking**
Many ideas emerged for how to **continue the journey**, but most groups imply that current systems **drop off after the event**.
4. **Celebrate, Don't Hide Baptism**
There's a clear desire to **reintegrate baptism into Sunday Mass** and celebrate it as a joyful, visible, communal milestone.
5. **Digital and Cultural Openness**
Carrigaline in particular offers a modern model of **evangelizing with joy, creativity, and visibility** — potentially inspiring for other parishes.

B. On the Eucharist

1. Active Participation & Inclusion

- Strong emphasis across all parishes on transitioning from passive spectatorship to active participation by laity.
- Encouragement for parishioners of all ages – especially children and youth – to be involved in ministries: readers, choir, altar servers, prayers of the faithful, and offertory.
- Welcoming environments and visible lay involvement seen as crucial.

2. Preparation for the Eucharist

- Regular mention of the importance of preparing in advance: reading scripture, reflecting on the readings, and using tools like “God’s Word” booklets.
- Some advocate for parish-based groups (Lectio Divina, scripture reflection, Alpha) to discuss readings beforehand.

3. Homily and Language

- Homilies should be short, engaging (max 8–10 minutes), and clearly connected to the readings and everyday life.
- Simpler, more accessible language requested to ensure relevance and understanding.
- Suggestion for occasional lay-led reflections or homilies.

4. Youth Engagement

- Many called for monthly or regular youth Masses led by youth (music, readings, hospitality).
- Schools viewed as key partners for formation and liturgical involvement.
- Alpha Youth, prayer groups, and other structured programmes recommended.

5. Community and Fellowship

- Tea/coffee after Mass suggested frequently as a way to foster fellowship and encourage returning attendance.
- Social outlets for parents and families (especially young families) seen as bridges between the liturgy and community life.

6. Hospitality and Welcome

- A “ministry of welcome” – greeters, ushers, and priests at the door – was considered fundamental.
- Several parishes advocate for smiling, chatting, and engaging people at the threshold as powerful first impressions.

7. Spiritual Formation

- Importance of rekindling foundational faith through adult catechesis, RCIA, YouCat, Sycamore.
- Formation of young parents during sacramental preparation (e.g. Baptism, First Communion) is viewed as an opportunity to re-engage.

8. Environment and Atmosphere

- Desire for warm, bright, and inviting church settings (heating, sound system, seating).
- Silence, reverence, and music mentioned frequently as enhancing the spiritual experience.

Comparison by Parish

Parish	Distinctive Emphases	Common Themes Shared with Others
Carrigaline	Very comprehensive submission with strong theological grounding. Advocated for catechesis, RCIA, Alpha, youth ministry, regular discussion groups, and restructuring homilies and lay involvement.	Youth ministry, hospitality, short homilies, education.
Crosshaven	Focused more on simplicity and joyful engagement. Suggestions for Angelus, visible altar participation, music.	Youth involvement, music, priest-parishioner interaction.
Harbour Parishes	Strong focus on language accessibility, relevance of Eucharistic celebration to daily life, and community solidarity. Included Confession as preparatory.	Welcome ministries, relevance of homilies, lay roles.
Tracton Abbey	Praised existing priestly engagement, emphasized tying Mass to community events and school links. Called for more youth engagement and welcoming culture.	Catechesis, youth roles, welcoming environment.

Summary of Trends

- **Shared Strengths:** Welcoming culture, musical participation, and reflection on readings are core to renewal.
- **Gaps Noted:**
 - Several parishes noted that few young people remain involved post-Confirmation.
 - Many called for clearer catechesis – foundational understanding of the Mass and Eucharist is lacking.
- **Innovative Ideas:**
 - Open-air Mass at a Mass Rock (Carrigaline).
 - “Welcome Team” at Masses (Carrigaline, Harbour, Tracton).

- Lay-led preparation of Prayers of the Faithful (Carrigaline).
- More use of visual/liturgical symbolism (Tracton).

C. On the Families of Parishes

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

- **Carrigaline:** Experiences varied. Positives include priest rotation and shared services. However, support seems clergy-centered, with confusion and communication gaps noted. Minimal change perceived by some.
 - **Crosshaven:** Mostly sustained sacramental life thanks to support from other priests. The overall impact of the Family model appears limited.
 - **Harbour Parishes:** Generally unclear or negative. Confusion and lack of information led to low morale and minimal perceived benefit, though priest rotation is acknowledged.
 - **Tracton Abbey:** Strongly positive. Clergy collaboration is appreciated. Parishioners value exposure to different priests and sustained liturgical life.
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2. How is your parish supporting the Family of Parishes?

- **Carrigaline:** Supports through shared choirs, courses, and clergy. However, lay collaboration is limited, and more structured involvement is suggested.
 - **Crosshaven:** Shows support by participating in shared services and joint newsletters. Welcomes visiting priests.
 - **Harbour Parishes:** Feels disconnected. Support mainly through clergy; parishioners express feelings of exclusion and minimal integration.
 - **Tracton Abbey:** Actively involved via a strong Pastoral Council and shared events. Encourages inter-parish communication and gradual integration.
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3. What have been the challenges for your parish since becoming part of the Family of Parishes?

- **Carrigaline:** Challenges include overworked clergy, priest scheduling, and weak lay engagement. Some resistance to change is noted.
 - **Crosshaven:** Lost daily Mass; challenges are mostly seen as affecting clergy rather than parishioners.
 - **Harbour Parishes:** Struggles with Mass time changes, unfamiliarity between parishes, and generational disengagement.
 - **Tracton Abbey:** Lacks a resident priest and lost a regular Mass. Feels loss of parish identity and reduced presence of clergy.
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4. How can we celebrate sacramental life as a Family of Parishes?

- **Carrigaline:** Suggests unified sacramental events, better scheduling, and inclusive practices like transportation for elderly.
 - **Crosshaven:** Supports shared services like Reconciliation, but sees difficulty in merging school and parish celebrations.
 - **Harbour Parishes:** Favors joint sacraments and spiritual events like retreats or missions.
 - **Tracton Abbey:** Encourages shared sacraments and deeper lay involvement. Calls for welcoming and inclusive approaches.
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5. How do we encourage younger people to participate in the faith community?

- **Carrigaline:** Proposes structured youth outreach: youth Masses, music, school engagement, social justice themes, and a dedicated youth leader.
 - **Crosshaven:** Promotes youth Masses, school talks, choirs, and diocesan youth events.
 - **Harbour Parishes:** Acknowledges challenges. Recommends school involvement, role modelling, and direct communication with students.
 - **Tracton Abbey:** Notes demographic difficulties. Supports family Masses, catechesis, and incorporating music and social events.
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6. How can ministries be further supported across the Family of Parishes?

- **Carrigaline:** Calls for structured training, appreciation, and even a paid coordinator to reduce pressure on volunteers.
 - **Crosshaven:** Supports mentoring, training, and expanding team roles. Encourages female participation.
 - **Harbour Parishes:** Suggests forming cross-parish teams, promoting active recruitment, and more regular team meetings.
 - **Tracton Abbey:** Encourages lay involvement and sharing of experiences. Some feel support is already sufficient.
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7. What do you hope the Family of Parishes will look like in 5–10 years?

- **Carrigaline:** Hopes for a vibrant, inclusive Church with strong lay leadership. Some call for institutional reform (e.g. married/women priests).
- **Crosshaven:** Envisions vibrant parishes with active ministry teams and strong youth engagement.
- **Harbour Parishes:** Seeks unity, lay empowerment (especially women), and a nourishing, Spirit-filled faith community.
- **Tracton Abbey:** Wants to retain identity, ensure Mass availability, and deepen lay involvement as clergy numbers decline.