

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 Clogheen/Kerry Pike, Farranree, Gurranabraher and Knocknaheeny/Hollyhill.

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. Integration of Baptism with the Wider Faith Community

- **At Mass:** All four parishes emphasize incorporating baptisms into regular Sunday Masses. This approach makes the baptism visible to the whole parish, strengthens community bonds, and highlights baptism as a communal—not private—sacrament.
 - *Clogheen & Kerry Pike:* Link baptism to the Mass like First Communion and Confirmation.
 - *Farranree, Gurranabraher, Knocknaheeny & Hollyhill:* Baptisms should take place at Mass, not as isolated events.

2. Pre-Baptism Preparation

- **Education and Formation:** Strong emphasis on preparing parents and godparents with a clearer understanding of the sacrament and its responsibilities.
 - *Clogheen & Kerry Pike:* Suggest structured preparation including attendance at Mass and tracked participation.
 - *Gurranabraher:* Notes that large baptisms often become social gatherings with little faith content—preparation is needed to change this.
 - *Knocknaheeny & Hollyhill:* Proposes meetings and follow-up with parents before and after the baptism.

3. Follow-up and Ongoing Engagement

- **Building Relationships:** There's a recurring call for **ongoing contact** with families after the baptism.
 - *Farranree:* Suggests inviting families back to Mass and normalizing babies and children in church—even if noisy.

- *Knocknaheeny & Hollyhill*: Recommends outreach from parishioners and baptism teams to support the family's continued connection.
- *Clogheen & Kerry Pike*: Encourages parents to become active in parish life and ministries post-baptism.

4. Involvement of Children and Youth

- **Developing Faith from Early On**: Responses from multiple parishes stress that baptism is only the beginning and that children must be continually engaged.
 - *Farranree*: Suggests targeting young children through school Masses, gospel-based activities, and visual resources.
 - *Gurranabraher & Knocknaheeny*: Propose child-friendly Masses and involving First Communion/Confirmation classes in baptism events.

5. Theological Emphasis

- **Understanding Baptism's Spiritual Significance**: Some responses reflect deeply on baptism as an entry into the life of grace, the Church, and unity with Christ.
 - *Farranree & Gurranabraher*: Highlight baptism as receiving the Holy Spirit and becoming one with God.
 - *Clogheen & Kerry Pike*: Emphasizes baptism as the "start on the road of faith" and not just a social or cultural rite.

Notable Ideas

- **Tracking participation** in Mass before baptism (*Clogheen & Kerry Pike*), akin to "Do This in Memory."
- **Reforming the structure of the ceremony** – possibly separating the preparatory parts of baptism from the main celebration (*Knocknaheeny & Hollyhill*).
- **Use of children's contributions** in preparing for and participating in the baptism ceremony (*Farranree, Knocknaheeny & Hollyhill*).
- **Pastoral visitations and personal follow-up**, which help move beyond one-time events toward sustained pastoral relationships.

Overall Reflections

These parishes demonstrate a consistent recognition that **baptism is often underutilized as a true gateway into the faith community**. To change this, the parishes propose a mix of:

- **Liturgical integration**
- **Structured preparation**
- **Personalized follow-up**
- **Parental empowerment**
- **Ongoing community engagement**

There's also a strong theological awareness that **baptism initiates a journey**—not a single day—and that the parish must actively nurture that journey in practical, relational, and spiritual ways.

B. On the Eucharist

1. Welcome and Inclusion

- All four parishes highlight the importance of **welcoming parishioners**, especially **children, newcomers, and the wider community**.
 - *Clogheen & Kerry Pike* propose priests introduce themselves and thank all who contribute.
 - *Farranree* and *Knocknaheeny* advocate involving children early (e.g. altar servers, choirs) to build lasting engagement.
 - *Gurranabraher* stresses heartfelt liturgical delivery as a form of welcome and connection.

2. Lay Participation

- Each parish emphasizes involving lay people actively in Mass:
 - Through **readings, Prayers of the Faithful, choirs, and Eucharistic ministry**.
 - *Knocknaheeny* and *Clogheen & Kerry Pike* underscore inviting rather than selecting participants to foster true inclusion.

3. Relevance of the Homily and Liturgy

- There is a strong call for **homilies to be clear, relevant, and relatable**:
 - *Farranree* and *Gurranabraher* call for real-life connections and simplicity.
 - *Knocknaheeny* suggests priests tailor messages to the struggles of parishioners, using the homily as a teaching tool for the faith.

4. Music and Atmosphere

- All four parishes highlight **music as central to worship**, particularly to engage **young people and elevate the liturgy**.
 - *Farranree* and *Clogheen & Kerry Pike* note choirs help make Mass more joyful and meaningful.
 - *Gurranabraher* links singing to spiritual depth ("to sing is to pray twice").

5. Youth Engagement

- Youth involvement is considered **critical for the Church's future**:
 - *Farranree* and *Knocknaheeny* mention **youth-led Masses, artwork**, and involving Confirmation classes.
 - *Clogheen & Kerry Pike* suggest children's activity sheets, choirs, and participation in Mass rituals.

6. Preparation and Reflection

- Personal and communal preparation for Mass is seen as vital:
 - *Knocknaheeny* recommends using **Mass leaflets**, catechism resources, and silent prayer.
 - *Clogheen & Kerry Pike* and *Gurranabraher* emphasize **reflection time** and active listening during Mass.

7. Community and Pastoral Life

- Parish as **community hub** is a recurring ideal:
 - *Farranree* and *Clogheen & Kerry Pike* mention **monthly coffee mornings**, social events, and noticeboards.
 - *Knocknaheeny* emphasizes service—visiting the sick, community cleaning, and supporting the vulnerable.

Comparison and Contrast by Parish

Parish	Unique Emphases	Shared with Other Parishes
Clogheen & Kerry Pike	Priests introducing themselves; activity sheets for kids; noticeboards	Welcome, music, youth involvement, post-Mass gatherings
Farranree	Use of social media to celebrate youth involvement; inclusive leaflets	Music, youth-led Masses, artwork, monthly coffee mornings
Gurranabraher	Emphasis on heartfelt proclamation of liturgy and deep reflection	Singing, real-life preaching, personal reflection during Mass
Knocknaheeny & Hollyhill	Integration of catechism and sacramental understanding; outreach to sick and vulnerable	Mass preparation, children's involvement, practical homilies, reverent silence

Trends Across These Parishes

- **Lay involvement and youth inclusion** are seen as keys to building a vibrant and sustainable Church.
- **Music, welcoming environments, and clear communication** make Mass more engaging.
- There is a shared concern that many, especially young people, **lack catechetical foundation**, and this needs to be addressed both in and outside the liturgy.
- **Practical hospitality**, like tea after Mass or acknowledging contributions, helps build community and connection.

C. On the Families of Parishes

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

Key Theme: Shared priestly ministry and increased inter-parish support

All four parishes value the **sharing of priests**, particularly for Masses, funerals, baptisms, and other sacraments.

- **Clogheen & Kerry Pike** express deep appreciation for ongoing priestly presence despite not having a resident priest, noting they still feel seen and supported.
- **Farranree** sees benefit in mutual support, especially when a priest is unavailable, and highlights the smooth sharing of liturgical duties.
- **Gurranabraher** speaks of the emotional and spiritual support for priests through shared responsibility.
- **Knocknaheeny & Hollyhill** echo this, appreciating the variety and continuity of Masses, and point to positive signs like choirs from other parishes enriching their liturgies.

Overall, the model allows **functionality despite reduced clergy**, and fosters a **sense of unity** through shared spiritual leadership.

2. How is your parish supporting the Family of Parishes?

Key Theme: Practical collaboration, mutual attendance, and shared resources

Support is largely **practical and reciprocal**:

- **Clogheen & Kerry Pike** participate through **financial support, newsletter collaboration**, and **attendance at other churches** when needed.
- **Farranree** emphasizes cross-attendance at Masses and sees the family model as the new norm.
- **Gurranabraher** offers **acceptance and openness** to visiting clergy as a form of support.
- **Knocknaheeny & Hollyhill** stress the importance of **dialogue, joint meetings**, and **encouraging Mass attendance** across parish lines.

Support is often **informal** and priest-led, but laity are gradually becoming more engaged, especially in communication and liturgical presence.

3. What have been the challenges since joining the Family of Parishes?

Key Theme: Adjusting to reduced local autonomy, fewer Masses, and lower lay participation

- **Clogheen & Kerry Pike** highlight the **emotional impact of losing a resident priest**, and the adjustment to fewer daily Masses.
- **Farranree** notes **reduced Mass availability, declining minister numbers**, and logistical challenges in covering needs across parishes.
- **Gurranabraher** focuses on ensuring **welcoming environments**, showing concern for parish vitality.
- **Knocknaheeny & Hollyhill** observe a challenge in **lay ministry recruitment** rather than structural changes.

Summary: Emotional transition, loss of routine, and volunteer shortages are common themes, especially in the context of priest shortages and changing Mass schedules.

4. How can we celebrate sacramental life as a Family of Parishes?

Key Theme: Shared liturgies, devotions, and spiritual collaboration

- **Clogheen & Kerry Pike** suggest aligning **major sacraments (Communion, Confirmation)** with regular Sunday Masses and emphasize inter-parish promotion of events.
- **Farranree** advocates for **joint workshops** (e.g. Baptism prep) and “In Memory” Masses across parishes.
- **Gurranabraher** points to the **importance of reverence and scriptural grounding**, especially through Holy Hours.
- **Knocknaheeny & Hollyhill** propose **Lenten retreats, novenas, and renewal meetings** among parish councils and ministries.

Broadly, there's appetite for **collective liturgical moments** that foster a **deeper sense of community** and spiritual renewal.

5. How do we encourage younger people to participate in the faith community?

Key Theme: Build relevance through schools, inclusive Masses, and peer involvement

- **Clogheen & Kerry Pike** recommend **faith education, school involvement, and dedicated youth Masses**.
- **Farranree** shows strong school-parish linkage, involving students in **liturgies, readings, and seasonal dramas** like the Good Friday pageant.
- **Gurranabraher** stress **relating to youth on their level** and offering an accessible Jesus.
- **Knocknaheeny & Hollyhill** suggest reintroducing **altar servers, music roles, and catechism/Sunday school** in schools.

Engagement hinges on **visibility, inclusion, and relevance**, especially when supported by peer activities and school ties.

6. How can our ministries (Word, Eucharist, Baptism, Funeral, RCIA, Alpha etc) be further supported?

Key Theme: Training, encouragement, and structured collaboration

- **Clogheen & Kerry Pike** call for **recognition during Mass, annual ministry gatherings, and sharing best practices.**
- **Farranree** stresses **communication, teamwork, and support during funerals.**
- **Gurranabraher** suggest **meeting schedules and backups** to ensure continuity.
- **Knocknaheeny & Hollyhill** believe more **recruitment and willingness to serve** are needed before expanding support.

7. What do you hope our Family of Parishes will look like in 5–10 years?

Key Theme: Vibrant, inclusive, lay-led communities with youth involvement

- **Clogheen & Kerry Pike** are hopeful for **more liberal leadership, younger involvement, and possibly female deacons.**
- **Farranree** want to see **increased collaboration, larger congregations, and continued priestly presence.**
- **Gurranabraher** imagines a **unified structure under one umbrella.**
- **Knocknaheeny & Hollyhill** foresee **fewer churches, aging populations, and larger, possibly strained families of parishes,** yet hold hope that **lay involvement** will counterbalance this trend.

Final Reflections

These four parishes share a **common commitment to adapting**, despite varying degrees of **emotional loss, structural change, and resource challenges.** The **Family of Parishes model** is valued for maintaining liturgical life, encouraging interconnection, and introducing new collaborative possibilities. However, continued focus on **training, youth engagement, and lay empowerment** will be essential to sustain vitality over the next decade.