

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 Drimoleague, Dunmanway, Kilmichael and Uibh Laoire.

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:-

- **How can we make baptism the gateway into life in our faith community?**
- **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?**
- **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. ¹On Baptism:-

1. Preparation, Reflection, and Catechesis

All three parishes agree that **parents need space to understand and prepare** for baptism more deeply.

- **Dunmanway:** Suggests rediscovering baptism as a *personal faith choice*, not just a cultural custom. Encourages conversations about the parents' own baptism stories.
- **Kilmichael:** Advocates for a **baptism team**, introductory support, and a **programme for parents**. Also highlights a gentle, non-judgmental approach for families not regularly attending.
- **Drimoleague/Drinagh:** Strong on creating **dialogue-based preparation sessions** and reflective conversations with parents.

 *Insight:* Baptismal prep should include **meaning-making**, not just logistics — helping parents link the sacrament to their own faith and future practice.


2. Ongoing Community Connection

All three groups emphasize **keeping families involved after baptism**:

- **Dunmanway:** Encourages follow-up by integrating children in the liturgy (e.g., singing, gift-bearing) and community events.

¹ The first session was attended by people from three of the four parishes.


- **Kilmichael:** Proposes **playgroups, youth clubs, and social gatherings** (tea after Mass) to create ongoing relational ties.
- **Drimoleague/Drinagh:** Suggests **annual celebration** for families whose children were baptised, especially near the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

 *Insight:* The community must build bridges from baptism to later sacraments and ongoing parish life.

3. Celebrating Baptism Within the Mass

There is growing interest in **restoring baptism to a communal context**:


- **Kilmichael and Drimoleague/Drinagh** explicitly suggest holding baptisms during **Sunday Mass** or **group baptisms**, rather than isolated events.
- This would help normalize the sacrament and allow the **faith community to witness and welcome** the child.

 *Insight:* Celebrating baptism publicly strengthens its communal meaning and deepens parish awareness of its significance.

4. Peer Support and Parental Fellowship

All three groups touch on the **social and emotional needs** of young families:

- **Dunmanway:** Stresses the importance of **young parents helping each other**, drawing on programmes like *Do This in Memory* for inspiration.
- **Kilmichael:** Suggests **fellowship and prayer groups**, especially for parents not practicing faith regularly, with a gentle and supportive tone.
- **Drimoleague/Drinagh:** Recommends helping **parents connect with others** with children of similar age, especially pre-schoolers.


 *Insight:* Peer-to-peer connection reduces isolation and helps normalize faith practice for young parents.

5. Reframing Baptism as a Lifelong Journey

Each group includes **deep theological reflections** on baptism as a beginning, not an end:

- **Dunmanway:** Frames baptism as “*spiritual rebirth*” for both parent and child — a personal responsibility.
- **Kilmichael:** Sees baptism as an *awakening* that should ripple out from the family to the wider Church.

- **Drimoleague/Drinagh:** Views baptism as “*currently too individualistic*” and calls for reintegration into **communal identity**.

 *Insight:* Recovering the **theological depth and communal nature** of baptism can help shift it from a one-day ritual to a way of life.

Summary Comparison Table

Theme	Dunmanway	Kilmichael	Drimoleague/Drinagh
Parent preparation & reflection	✓ Deep & personal	✓ Gentle, guided	✓ Dialogue-centered
Post-baptism engagement	✓ Family Masses, children’s roles	✓ Social & youth groups	✓ Annual gatherings
Baptism during Sunday Mass	◆ Implied	✓ Yes	✓ Strongly supported
Peer/parent fellowship	✓ Group support	✓ Fellowship & prayer	✓ Connecting families
Understanding baptism as journey	✓ Theological	✓ Symbolic & familial	✓ Communal vs private

✓ = Strong emphasis | ◆ = Implied or less developed

Distinctive Contributions

- **Dunmanway** offers a **personal, reflective approach** grounded in the theology of rebirth and community responsibility.
- **Kilmichael** proposes a wide-ranging network of **practical, non-judgmental supports**, including youth outreach and hospitality.
- **Drimoleague/Drinagh** stands out for its call to **restructure the baptismal process** to be more communal, seasonal, and liturgically rooted.

B. On the Eucharist

1. Youth Involvement

- Strong consensus on the importance of involving young people through altar serving, readings, prayers of the faithful, and choirs.
- Ideas to support this include **training**, **surveys**, and **dedicated youth events** (e.g., Youth 2000, youth-led Masses, school-linked liturgies).

2. Preparation Through Scripture

- Multiple parishes highlight the **importance of reading and reflecting on the Sunday readings in advance**, often suggesting tools like **Lectio Divina**, **Bible study groups**, or distributing leaflets.
- Priests are also called to better prepare homilies, grounded in both scripture and everyday life.

3. Community Building & Welcome

- Emphasis on creating a **welcoming church environment**: greeting at doors, involving parishioners in ministries, and social gatherings (e.g., tea after Mass).
- Importance of **pastoral care** for occasional attendees and lapsed Catholics, showing **sensitivity** rather than judgment.

4. Music and Liturgy

- Music is seen as essential for uplifting the spirit and enhancing participation—particularly **inclusive singing** and **youth choirs**.
- Suggestions for more **reflection time during Mass** and clear, simple homilies that **connect to real life**.

5. Living the Faith

- Faith should **extend beyond Sunday**: volunteerism, kindness, prayer groups, and connecting with isolated individuals.
- The Eucharist seen as a **source of strength** for daily Christian living, and this message should be emphasised.

Parish-by-Parish Comparison

Dunmanway

- Highly **practical and community-oriented**.
- Strong on **youth inclusion**, **lay involvement**, and **real-life homily application**.

- Promotes **preparation (Bible study)** and ongoing **support structures (support groups, prayer meetings)**.

Kilmichael

- Focused on **inclusivity, simplicity, and compassion**.
- Strong emphasis on **social outreach** (e.g., collecting the elderly, looking after vulnerable neighbours).
- Encourages **open discussion** on how young people might reshape the church.

Drimoleague/Drinagh

- Unique focus on the **Holy Spirit** and **daily spiritual experiences**.
- Strong promotion of **music** and **intergenerational prayers of thanks**.
- Realistic about overburdening Sunday Mass: promotes **faith education and catechesis beyond Sunday**.

Uibh Laoire

- Theologically deep—focus on **spiritual formation, Eucharistic meaning, and call to discipleship**.
- Concerned with **retaining marginal attendees** and not alienating lapsed Catholics.
- Promotes **imaginative engagement** with Scripture, **prayer groups**, and **gentle evangelisation**.

Contrasts and Distinctive Features

Parish	Distinctive Emphasis	Notes
Dunmanway	Homilies grounded in life experience	Strong praise for specific priest's approach
Kilmichael	Focus on Christian values & social justice	Emphasises simplicity in homilies and inclusive celebration
Drimoleague/Drinagh	Spiritual reflection on the Holy Spirit	Suggests young and old offer personal reflections during Mass
Uibh Laoire	Catechesis and quiet discipleship	Cautions against superficiality, advocates deep reflection and outreach

Common Recommendations

- Start **Bible or faith-sharing groups** during the week.
- Use **music, inclusive liturgies, and ministries** to make Mass joyful and engaging.
- Create **spaces and moments** for post-Mass social connection.
- Ensure that young people have **meaningful roles** and feel seen and supported.
- **Educate families and catechise adults**, not just children.
- Acknowledge the Eucharist as **thanksgiving and community**, not just ritual.

C. On the Families of Parishes

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

A key theme across all four parishes is **shared priestly support**.

- **Kilmichael** emphasizes the logistical strain of covering three churches with no resident priest, noting that support has helped but challenges persist.
- **Uibh Laoire** expresses appreciation for continued access to sacraments and a sense of not being isolated, though lay awareness of change is minimal.
- **Drimoleague & Drinagh** value the improved Mass scheduling and mutual priest coverage.
- **Dunmanway** praises the support system as both spiritual and practical, highlighting collaborative newsletters, priest sharing, and stronger parish interconnectivity.

While priest support is seen as vital, some parishes—particularly **Kilmichael**—feel left on the margins due to geography or the absence of a resident priest.

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

Here, **clergy cooperation** stands out as the main form of support, with **lay involvement still emerging**.

- **Kilmichael** acknowledges limited ability to contribute given their internal demands.
 - **Uibh Laoire** notes that most support is at the priest level, though there is growing lay mobility across parishes for Mass.
 - **Drimoleague & Drinagh** speak of practical cooperation but express concern that the effort feels one-sided at times.
 - **Dunmanway** shows the most robust lay engagement—funeral teams helping in other parishes, joint choir and altar server participation, and rotating Masses to reduce clergy load.
-

3. What have been the challenges for your parish since becoming part of the Family of Parishes?

The most consistent challenges involve **Mass scheduling, loss of local autonomy, and geographic/logistical complexity**.

- **Kilmichael** struggles with identity and coordination as a "peripheral" parish with three churches and no resident priest.
- **Uibh Laoire** points to reduced Masses, discomfort with change, and the challenge of rallying lay participation.
- **Drimoleague & Drinagh** cite physical distance and rigid parish boundaries as obstacles to integration.

- **Dunmanway** reports adjustment pains related to fewer Sunday Masses and the need to plan all sacraments and events further in advance.
-

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

A theme of **collaborative liturgies and preparation** emerges across responses.

- **Kilmichael** suggests proximity-based partnerships like with Macroom.
 - **Uibh Laoire** proposes shared Reconciliation services, Alpha, and Scripture groups; they seek deeper spiritual experiences in sacraments.
 - **Drimoleague & Drinagh** endorse communal services but again highlight travel challenges.
 - **Dunmanway** offers ideas such as joint sacramental preparation, artistic collaboration, and pooling resources for major events like Confirmation.
-

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

All four parishes agree: **youth engagement is crucial but complex**.

- **Kilmichael** calls for starting within families and local communities outside of school.
 - **Uibh Laoire** advocates catechesis and Alpha for youth, with school partnerships as key entry points.
 - **Drimoleague & Drinagh** suggest active roles in prayer and reflection, and more parish-based sacrament preparation.
 - **Dunmanway** is particularly vibrant in this area—offering youth Masses, choirs, reader roles, and an inclusive environment, with one respondent stressing the importance of **welcoming diversity**.
-

6. How can ministries be further supported?

A shared emphasis is placed on **training, collaboration, and communication**.

- **Uibh Laoire** and **Drimoleague & Drinagh** advocate for **regular retreats, team gatherings**, and mutual learning between parishes.
 - **Dunmanway** stands out again with calls for **formal training, appreciation events, and community outreach**, already operating strong funeral and baptismal teams.
 - **Kilmichael** did not provide an answer, perhaps due to current strain on resources.
-

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

There is cautious **hopefulness tempered by realism**.

- **Kilmichael** offered no comment—possibly reflecting uncertainty or concern.
- **Uibh Laoire** hopes for greater lay involvement, deeper faith, and vibrant worship, while acknowledging it's hard to stay optimistic amid change.
- **Drimoleague & Drinagh** want structured **youth programming** and broader lay involvement.
- **Dunmanway** envisions a future with **fewer priests and more lay leadership**, more **inter-parish cooperation**, and a **faith community that is open, inclusive, and youth-led**.

Summary Themes Across Parishes

Theme	Common Observations
Priest Sharing	Welcomed as necessary; core support system.
Mass Scheduling	A major challenge, particularly in larger or rural parishes.
Youth Engagement	Seen as essential but underdeveloped; music and inclusivity are promising entry points.
Ministry Support	Needs training, recognition, and inter-parish collaboration.
Parish Identity	Risk of dilution or marginalization noted in smaller or peripheral parishes.
Vision for Future	Optimism hinges on empowering the laity and building community, especially among young people