

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 Blackpool, Ballyvolane & The Glen, The Cathedral, St. Patrick's, Ss Peter & Paul's, and South Parish.

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. Strong Emphasis on Preparation and Education

All five parishes underscored the **need for pre-baptism preparation**—not only informational but formational:

- **Pre-baptism meetings** or courses for **parents and godparents** to understand the meaning, responsibilities, and implications of the sacrament.
- Some called for **ongoing catechesis** even after baptism, both for parents and children (e.g. Sunday school, family faith formation).
- Ss. Peter & Paul's emphasized structured **pre- and post-baptismal catechesis** and parental faith formation.

"The preparations of the parents will solely affect the spiritual growth of the child" (The Cathedral)

2. Baptism as a Public and Community Event

Many responses suggested **integrating baptisms into Sunday Mass**, or at least **regular community celebrations**:

- Seen as vital for **community witness** and **welcoming the child**.
- Several suggested **annual Masses for newly baptised children**, like the Remembrance Masses held for the deceased.
- Multiple parishes proposed **social follow-ups**, like informal gatherings post-Mass.

"Celebrate baptism during family Mass, and have tea/coffee afterwards to connect families."
(St. Patrick's)

3. Welcoming Families and Building Relationships

There was a strong desire to **foster community support**:

- **Baptismal support teams** to greet and accompany families.
- Suggested ongoing **contact by parish** (calls, newsletters, check-ins).
- The Cathedral and South Parish both highlighted **follow-up care**, not just the one-off event.
- Proposals for **volunteer sponsors or mentor families** to journey with the newly baptised.

"A 'Journey with your Child' group to support parents through different age groups" (Blackpool)

4. Involvement of Children and Families in Parish Life

Suggestions to **involve children and families** early and often:

- **Children's choirs**, readers, altar servers, and participation in the Prayer of the Faithful.
 - **Youth Masses, Sunday School, or children's liturgy groups** to keep young people engaged.
 - Proposals for **creche or toddler-friendly areas** to make churchgoing less stressful for parents.
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5. Faith in the Home

Several parishes emphasized the importance of **faith being nurtured at home**, not just in the church:

- Encouraging **family prayer**, teaching children prayers and sacraments.
 - Highlighting the **role of godparents and grandparents** in passing on faith.
 - St. Patrick's called Baptism "the start of the child's spiritual journey," with parents as primary educators.
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6. Theological Reflection and Broader Perspective

Some responses reflected deeper theological thinking:

- Ss. Peter & Paul's reflected on the **call to holiness and witness** from Vatican II.
- The Cathedral emphasized Baptism as "a sacrament of faith," which needs **community** to grow.
- One respondent challenged the framing of the question itself: "**How can we make baptism the gateway? It already is.**"

Observations

These parishes reveal a strong desire to revitalize the sacrament of Baptism as an entry into a living, growing faith community, not a one-day ritual. Their answers suggest:

- A shift from event-based to relationship-based engagement.
- A growing recognition of the need for community, catechesis, and consistency.
- Parishes want to move from maintenance mode to mission, using Baptism as a real opportunity for evangelisation and pastoral care.

B. On the Eucharist

1. Welcome and Hospitality

- Almost every parish emphasized the importance of greeting people warmly before Mass and creating an inclusive atmosphere. Specific suggestions included:
 - Priests/parishioners standing at the door (Blackpool, South Parish, Cathedral).
 - “Say hello, smile, be inviting” (St. Patrick’s).
 - Welcome ministries and involving youth in this (Cathedral, South Parish).

2. Youth Involvement

- All parishes stress that involving young people is crucial for the future of the Church.
 - Youth Masses, altar serving, music participation (Blackpool, South Parish).
 - Teaching younger people their role in liturgy and faith (St. Patrick’s, Cathedral).
 - Encouraging them to do “small jobs” or act as greeters or readers (Blackpool).

3. Preparation and Catechesis

- Strong call for both spiritual and practical preparation:
 - Reading the Sunday readings in advance, Lectio Divina, praying before Mass (Cathedral, Ss. Peter and Paul’s).
 - Reflection groups or midweek discussions to deepen understanding (Blackpool, South Parish).
 - Education around symbols and meaning of the Eucharist and the Mass (St. Patrick’s, Ss. Peter and Paul’s).

4. Liturgical Engagement

- Several ideas to enhance participation and reverence in the Mass:
 - Clear proclamation of readings and audible prayers (Ss. Peter and Paul’s, Cathedral).
 - Active roles for laity (ministers of Word/Eucharist, Prayers of the Faithful, collections) (St. Patrick’s, South Parish).
 - Visual and musical elements to increase solemnity and accessibility (music, screens, summary of readings) (South Parish, Cathedral).

5. Personal Disposition and Reflection

- Inner preparation and personal transformation were highlighted:
 - “Sit in the silence,” confession before Mass, remembering sins and seeking pardon (Cathedral).
 - Personal reflection on life and actions, bringing that to Mass and witnessing to others (St. Patrick’s).
 - “Give yourself a hug after Communion” as a sign of Christ within (Blackpool).

6. Community and Continuity

- Suggestions for sustaining faith beyond the Sunday celebration:
 - Tea and chat after Mass (South Parish, St. Patrick’s).
 - Bible study and weekly reflections via newsletters or social media (South Parish, St. Patrick’s).
 - Regular community events and marking family occasions at Mass (Cathedral).

Comparison of Parishes

Theme	Blackpool, The Glen & Ballyvolane	South Parish	Ss. Peter & Paul’s	St. Patrick’s	Cathedral
Warm Welcome	Strong emphasis (multiple comments)	Monthly tea & silent time	Some mention, focus on clarity	Greeting, friendly tone	Priests meet & greet
Youth Engagement	Highlighted repeatedly	Youth Masses monthly	Suggested by implication	Collection, readings	Children and family Mass
Catechesis & Teaching	Reflection group, pre-Gospel talks	Silent reflection, relatable homily	Emphasis on liturgical education	Catechesis via website	Detailed preparation before Mass
Lay Involvement	Encouraged at many levels	All ages included	Reader clarity/practice focus	Inclusive, multi-generational	Choir, response encouraged
Music and Art	Central role suggested	Important mood setter	Familiar tunes recommended	Enhances joy	Choir emphasized
Ongoing Community Engagement	Holy Hour, Rosary, Confession	After-Mass tea, silence	Booklets, seasonal instruction	Bible study groups	Family celebration focus

Summary Insights

- There is widespread recognition that the Eucharist must be a communal, inclusive, and joy-filled experience.
- Practical preparation (readings, hospitality, liturgical roles) is closely linked with spiritual nourishment.

- There is strong interest in reviving and involving youth, often seen as both a challenge and a priority.
- Education—both about the Mass and about broader Christian living—is viewed as essential to deepen understanding and engagement.
- All parishes express a desire for the Mass to be more meaningful, less routine, and better connected to people’s real lives and needs.

C. On the Families of Parishes

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

- **Blackpool:** Collaboration is emerging, but the impact is minimal so far due to being new to the structure.
 - **South Parish:** The provision of Mass is appreciated, but there's a strong sense of discontinuity and lack of cohesion.
 - **St. Peter's & Paul's:** Clergy quality and bishop support praised, though outreach to laypeople is limited.
 - **St. Patrick's:** Priestly support and newsletter help keep the parish functioning, despite no resident priest.
 - **Cathedral:** Increased collaboration and shared ceremonies have improved parish vitality.
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2. How is your parish supporting the Family of Parishes?

- **Blackpool:** Sharing resources and some joint activity; engagement still developing.
 - **South Parish:** Participation is low due to numbers and morale; efforts via parish assembly noted.
 - **St. Peter's & Paul's:** Support through the provision of Mass, but deeper liturgical and pastoral ties are needed.
 - **St. Patrick's:** Willing to assist others; support is situational rather than structured.
 - **Cathedral:** Encourages volunteerism and collaboration across parishes, values unity.
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3. What have been the challenges for your parish since becoming part of the Family of Parishes?

- **Blackpool:** Few explicit responses; priest shortage seen as broader issue.
 - **South Parish:** Loss of parish priest and weak communication made integration difficult.
 - **St. Peter's & Paul's:** Lack of lay-clergy connection; call to deepen spiritual participation.
 - **St. Patrick's:** Loss of priest and some disconnection; fear of marginalization.
 - **Cathedral:** Priests overextended; differences between large and small parishes affect equity.
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4. How can we celebrate sacramental life as a Family of Parishes?

- **Blackpool:** Some suggestions for joint feast days and ceremonies.
- **South Parish:** Emphasized the need for communication; ideas still vague.
- **St. Peter's & Paul's:** Advocates for consistent and beautiful liturgy across parishes.
- **St. Patrick's:** Wants more communication, mixing between churches, and visibility of sacraments.

- **Cathedral:** Suggests shared feast days, solemn services, and better cross-parish invitations.
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5. How do we encourage younger people to participate?

- **Blackpool:** Use music, climate justice, and service to engage; need leadership.
 - **South Parish:** School links exist but are weak due to fewer schools; desire stronger youth outreach.
 - **St. Peter's & Paul's:** Emphasis on reverent liturgies, service opportunities, and altar servers.
 - **St. Patrick's:** Involvement through small tasks, school engagement, and family Masses.
 - **Cathedral:** Youth festivals, volunteering, and service-learning are central suggestions.
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6. How can our ministries (Word, Eucharist, Baptism, Funeral, RCIA, Alpha etc) be further supported?

- **Blackpool:** Suggests a lay parish manager to coordinate activity under priest guidance.
 - **South Parish:** Little confidence in current structures; seeks shared learning among teams.
 - **St. Peter's & Paul's:** Encourage vocations, especially among youth; link ministry to service.
 - **St. Patrick's:** Better outreach, training, and communication needed.
 - **Cathedral:** Not directly addressed, but implied support for lay leadership.
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7. What do you hope our Family of Parishes will look like in the next 5 to 10 years?

- **Blackpool:** More inclusive collaboration and lay-clergy support.
- **South Parish:** Mixed feelings; concern for decline but glimpses of youth engagement offer hope.
- **St. Peter's & Paul's:** Longs for revival of vocations and a more connected parish life.
- **St. Patrick's:** Envisions more unity and active fellowship, with increased lay roles.
- **Cathedral:** Hopes priests can prioritize pastoral work while laypeople lead operational roles.