

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 Ballineaspig, Curraheen, Sacred Heart and Wilton (SMA).

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

All four parishes agree on the need for **meaningful baptism preparation**.

- **Ballineaspig:** Advocates catechesis tailored to age groups, inspirational talks, and formation that continues after baptism.
- **Curaheen:** Highlights the role of the **baptism team** in explaining the meaning and symbols of the sacrament to parents.
- **Sacred Heart:** Emphasizes formation as a long-term process — including catechumenate-style pathways and talks from the altar.
- **SMA Wilton:** Suggests fewer but more intentional baptisms annually, with deeper instruction for parents and godparents.

 **Insight:** Baptism prep should combine **faith education, pastoral care, and honest conversation** about commitment.

2. Baptism Teams and Personal Welcome

All groups see **baptism teams** as vital for **hospitality and formation**.

- **Ballineaspig, Curaheen, and Sacred Heart** describe baptism teams as bridges between parents and parish.


- **SMA Wilton** raises the question: is current prep enough? Suggests monthly family Masses as follow-up.

 *Insight:* Baptism teams are not just **catechetical**, but also **relational** — creating the first connection with the faith community.

3. Post-Baptism Follow-Up and Engagement

There is strong emphasis on **continuing the relationship** beyond the baptism day.


- **Ballineaspaig:** Suggests keeping in touch with godparents and children between baptism and First Communion.
- **Curaheen:** Proposes **annual gatherings** and **Christmas/Easter family liturgies**.
- **Sacred Heart:** Encourages giving gifts, sharing sweets, and involving the family in ongoing sacraments.
- **SMA Wilton:** Recommends monthly Mass for newly baptised families.

 *Insight:* Regular **contact, ritual reminders, and inclusion** help parents see baptism as the beginning of a shared journey.

4. Family-Friendly Mass and Physical Space

Creating **welcoming environments** at Mass is a recurring theme.


- **Curaheen:** Advocates quiet rooms, relaxed seating, and understanding around children's behaviour.
- **Ballineaspaig:** Suggests storybooks, children's corners, and visuals to help children engage with liturgy.
- **Sacred Heart** and **SMA Wilton:** Stress the importance of making **Mass more relevant and accessible** for families.

 *Insight:* If families feel judged, unwelcome, or out of place, baptism will not lead to active faith life.

5. Integration into Parish Life

Participation must continue **beyond the ceremony**:

- **Ballineaspaig**: Proposes family Masses, renewal of baptism vows, and even tracking and listing baptised children.
- **Curaheen**: Encourages symbolic items (e.g., medals), storytelling, and drawing activities.
- **Sacred Heart**: Recommends deeper connection to schools, choirs, and parent groups.
- **SMA Wilton**: Suggests involving families in monthly liturgies and community conversations.

 *Insight*: Baptism must lead naturally into **parish activities, liturgy, and social connection**.

6. Broader Cultural Reflection

Two parishes comment on **wider cultural and pastoral challenges**:

- **Ballineaspaig**: Reflects on secularism, sports culture, and disconnection from Church.
- **Sacred Heart**: Calls for a rediscovery of baptism's spiritual meaning in a fragmented, post-Covid world.
- **SMA Wilton**: Raises the question of how to **reach young parents** when parish age profiles skew older.

 *Insight*: A baptismal strategy must be **realistic and mission-oriented**, sensitive to modern family life and non-engaged Catholics.

Comparative Summary Table

Theme	Ballineaspig	Curaheen	Sacred Heart	SMA Wilton
Parent Catechesis	✓ Deep & layered	✓ Practical	✓ Theological	✓ Focused
Baptism Teams & Welcome	✓ Encouraged	✓ Active	✓ Encouraged	✓ Questioned/enhanced
Follow-Up After Baptism	✓ Family Masses	✓ Gatherings	✓ Ongoing sacraments	✓ Monthly invitations
Child-Friendly Space at Mass	✓ Storybooks & spaces	✓ Quiet rooms	✓ Inclusive liturgy	✓ Emphasized
Integration into Parish Life	✓ Liturgical inclusion	✓ Symbolic links	✓ Choirs, schools	✓ Monthly Mass
Reflection on Cultural Change	✓ Secular challenges	◆ Implied	✓ Strong	✓ Age gap concern

✓ = Strong emphasis | ◆ = Mentioned or implied

Distinctive Insights from Each Group

Parish	Distinctive Contribution
Ballineaspig	Connects baptism to the full sacramental journey and faith formation over time
Curaheen	Emphasizes hospitality, symbolic engagement (drawing, medals), and lasting contact
Sacred Heart	Offers theological reflection and pastoral strategies for reconnecting families
SMA Wilton	Advocates a quality-over-quantity approach and sees need for generational outreach

B. On the Eucharist

1. Preparation and Reflection

- All four parishes strongly advocate **preparing for Mass by reading the Sunday readings in advance** and **personal reflection**:
 - **Ballineaspaig**: Emphasizes reading the Gospel and reflecting on how to share it.
 - **Curraheen & SMA Wilton**: Encourage both individual and group preparation, including mid-week scripture study.
 - **Sacred Heart**: Highlights both “remote” (strategic/parish-wide) and “immediate” (week-to-week) preparation, combining spiritual and practical planning.

2. Active Participation

- All parishes stress **engaging the laity actively in Mass**:
 - Involvement includes **readings, Prayers of the Faithful, bringing up gifts, and offertory processions**.
 - **Sacred Heart** and **Curraheen** also emphasize **inclusion of children and young people**, including children’s choir and Sunday school.

3. Community and Welcome

- A recurring desire to **foster community and belonging** through:
 - Welcoming teams (Ballineaspaig, Sacred Heart).
 - Post-Mass gatherings (Curraheen, Sacred Heart).
 - Creating warm environments (SMA Wilton emphasizes silence and spiritual presence).

4. Quality of Liturgy

- Calls for:
 - **Well-prepared readers and homilists** (all parishes).
 - **Meaningful, relevant homilies** that relate to life (Curraheen and Ballineaspaig especially).
 - **Silence and reverence** before and during Mass (SMA Wilton, Ballineaspaig).

5. Music and Singing

- Music is seen as essential to deepening participation:
 - All parishes value a **variety of music**, with **Curraheen** suggesting modern hymns and **SMA Wilton** recommending rotating musicians for freshness.

6. Ongoing Faith Formation

- Several responses link Eucharist participation with:

- **Faith education** (Curraheen's scripture talks, Sacred Heart's Eucharistic Adoration and family Masses).
- **Integration with daily life and service** (Curraheen and Sacred Heart especially highlight charity and outreach).

Comparative Summary

Theme	Ballineaspai	Curraheen	Sacred Heart	SMA Wilton
Mass Preparation	Individual, children's liturgy	Group scripture study, seasonal talks	Remote & immediate prep (strategic)	Readings posted early; spiritual prep
Participation	All age groups, especially youth	Full laity involvement	Sunday school, liturgy involvement	Strong emphasis on inner readiness
Community & Welcome	Eye contact, post-Mass social events	Emphasis on isolation, needs for belonging	Tea after Mass, greeters	Silent space, early church access
Liturgy Quality	Clarity, pacing, explanation	Homily with life connection, energy	Structure + welcome = sacred dignity	Focus on reverence and presence
Music	Every Mass, varied styles	Variety, modern hymns, good choir	Monthly children's choir, diverse music	Rotating musicians
Youth Engagement	Children's liturgy and participation	Schools, reenactments, choir	Involvement in reading, choir, art	Indirect through preparation
Faith & Life Connection	How Mass affects the week	Community, charity, Christ in the poor	Eucharist as service and unity	Emphasis on Gospel living

Insights and Notable Contrasts

- **Curraheen** offers the most **pastoral-social integration**, emphasizing both liturgical and community outreach.
 - **SMA Wilton** leans strongly into **spiritual depth**, with a contemplative and preparatory focus.
 - **Sacred Heart** blends **strategic and personal approaches**, using structured planning (remote/immediate prep) to animate the community.
 - **Ballineaspai** is strong on **participation and communication**, seeking better engagement through clarity and relevance.
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C. Summary & Analysis of Responses to the Seven Questions posed in Session 3: A review of the Family of Parishes model

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

- **Priest-sharing** is the main and most visible form of support: priests covering Masses, funerals, and reconciliation services across parishes.
 - Most lay respondents note that **little has changed for parishioners**, with limited interaction outside of priest cover.
 - Some mention **shared reconciliation services** as one concrete joint liturgical experience.
 - A few have started **shared funeral teams, Baptism teams, or "Unfolding the Word" groups**.
 - Some respondents express frustration at the **lack of tangible lay involvement** so far — mostly still a clerical arrangement.
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2 How is your parish supporting the Family of Parishes?

- Again, primarily through **priests covering for one another**.
 - **Parish pastoral councils** have begun to attend joint meetings.
 - Lay leaders attend diocesan training, and newsletters sometimes share events across the Family.
 - **No strong evidence of structured lay collaboration** across parishes — most ministries remain parish-specific.
 - Some express that more **deliberate communication and joint planning** is needed.
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3 What have been the challenges for your parish since becoming part of the Family of Parishes?

- The most common challenges:
 - **Lack of communication and clarity** about what Family of Parishes actually means.
 - **Limited lay awareness**: many parishioners are unaware anything has changed.
 - Difficulty creating a **shared identity** — parishes still operate independently.
 - Concerns about the **future availability of priests** and the slow pace of lay engagement.
 - **Frustration over lack of clear direction** from the diocese.
 - No serious conflict, but widespread uncertainty.

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

- Suggestions include:
 - **Joint celebrations** for major feasts and sacraments.
 - **Shared reconciliation services** were seen as a good model.
 - Proposals for rotating **First Communions, Confirmations, Baptisms** across parishes.
 - Regular **Family of Parishes Masses and social gatherings**.
 - Overall: parishes are **open to shared celebrations**, but this is not yet common practice.
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5 How do we encourage younger people to participate?

- This remains the **most challenging question**.
 - Common proposals:
 - **Children's Masses, choirs, altar serving, bringing up gifts**.
 - Greater involvement via **schools and sacramental preparation**.
 - More creative liturgies or events to appeal to younger families.
 - One parish suggested **evening Masses** to fit better with young people's schedules.
 - A strong call for **listening directly to young people and their parents**.
 - But many acknowledge the **deep cultural challenge**: young families disengaged after sacraments.
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6 How can our ministries (Word, Eucharist, Baptism, Funeral, RCIA, Alpha etc) be further supported?

- Widespread agreement that:
 - **Shared training and formation** across parishes is needed.
 - Regular **meetings for ministry teams** to share ideas and support one another.
 - Joint formation could also improve **consistency** in how ministries operate.
 - Several suggest inviting **new people via personal invitation**.
 - Wilton noted the risk of lay burnout if existing leaders continue to carry the load.
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7 What do you hope our Family of Parishes will look like in the next 5 to 10 years?

- Most commonly expressed hopes:
 - A **vibrant, lay-led model** with far greater lay involvement.

- Retention of **shared priest support**, but acknowledging fewer priests long-term.
- A sense of **true shared identity and community** across parishes.
- Some hope for **rotating parish leadership** and deeper collaboration.
- Several explicitly hope for **formation of deacons, lay pastoral leaders, and women's ministry**.
- Widespread hope that churches **remain open and active**, but also realism about possible priest shortages.

OVERALL ANALYSIS

Positive Signs	Main Gaps & Concerns
Priest-sharing functioning well.	Still mostly a clergy-sharing model, not lay collaboration.
Good will and openness to the process.	Lack of clarity, communication and direction.
Willingness for joint sacramental celebrations.	No real structure for shared ministries or planning.
Desire for much more lay involvement.	High anxiety about the future of priesthood & vocations.
Review meetings seen as helpful starting point.	Limited awareness of Family of Parishes among many parishioners.

Summary Conclusion

This **Family of Parishes is at an early, cautious, but open stage**. There is willingness to move forward, particularly in:

- Shared lay ministry development
- Joint formation and training
- Creating opportunities for young people
- Building stronger identity as one family

However, to move from concept to reality, they need:

- **Clearer diocesan leadership**
- **Structures for shared decision-making**
- **Intentional lay formation**
- **Practical communication tools** (shared newsletters, calendars, social gatherings)