

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 Ballinlough, Blackrock, Blackrock Rd (SMA) and Mahon.

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.

On Baptism:-

1. Baptism Preparation and Catechesis

All four parishes stress the importance of **pre-baptism preparation**:

- **Ballinlough** and **Mahon** suggest multiple meetings with parents (and godparents), not just one-off sessions.
- **Blackrock** and **Blackrock Road** recommend structured catechesis, including video-based discussions, small group sessions, and informal conversations.
- **Mahon** connects baptismal preparation with the RCIA model — seeing baptism as a beginning of a journey, not a one-day event.

Emerging idea: Include godparents and extended family in formation, not just parents. Some also suggest **adult religious education** and **homilies focused on baptism** for wider parish awareness.

2. Welcoming Environment and Community Integration

- **Welcoming families** at Mass was a consistent idea — both before and after baptism. This includes:
 - Visiting homes (Ballinlough).
 - Having a visible presence of parishioners greeting families (Mahon, Blackrock).
 - Offering refreshments, children's corners, and parent meet-ups (Blackrock, Mahon).
- **Follow-up after baptism** is emphasized:

- Annual events for newly baptised children (Ballinlough, Mahon).
 - Creating long-term contact via WhatsApp, newsletters, or ongoing invitations to Mass (Ballinlough, Blackrock).
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3. Involvement in Mass and Parish Life

- **Involving families in Mass** is seen as crucial:
 - Special Masses for children and baptised families.
 - Baptisms during Sunday Mass to link the sacrament with the broader community.
 - Welcoming the child publicly (Blackrock, Ballinlough).
 - Homilies that speak to both parents and children.
 - There is a push to:
 - Include children in liturgy (e.g. readings, offertory).
 - Use visuals and child-friendly explanations of scripture (Mahon).
 - Recognize and encourage children's noise and spontaneity as part of the Church community.
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4. Ongoing Engagement and Spiritual Growth

- Suggestions include:
 - Creating groups like "Journey with Your Child" or post-baptism parent gatherings (Ballinlough, Blackrock).
 - Encouraging prayer at home and simple rituals (Ballinlough).
 - Organizing community events (family days, story time, children's choirs).
 - Having a **designated Baptism Support Team** to maintain contact.
 - **Blackrock Road** and **Mahon** suggest liturgical celebration of one's baptismal anniversary as a **yearly event**, akin to a spiritual birthday.
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5. Addressing Contemporary Barriers

The parishes acknowledge that:

- **Sunday sports and family busyness** often compete with faith practice (Ballinlough, Blackrock).
 - **Parents may lack faith formation** or feel uncomfortable in church due to unfamiliarity or fear of judgement (Mahon).
 - There's a **widening gap between baptism and further faith milestones** unless intentional efforts are made to bridge it (all four parishes).
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Notable Innovative Ideas

- **Baptism Sponsor/Parish Mentor:** Suggested by Ballinlough – a designated layperson as a bridge between parish and family.
- **Baptismal Celebrations Linked to Saints' Names:** Connecting the baptism to a saint can build tradition and meaning.
- **Public Naming and Applause at Mass:** From Blackrock – a strong gesture of community welcome.
- **Children's Area During Mass:** Consistently recommended, especially with colouring, drawing, or age-appropriate scripture.
- **Feast of Baptism Day:** Mahon suggests a parish or diocesan feast day celebrating all baptised – a public affirmation of baptism.

Summary of Trends

Theme	Ballinlough	Blackrock	Blackrock Road	Mahon
Pre-baptism preparation	✓	✓	✓	✓
Post-baptism follow-up	✓	✓	✓	✓
Baptism during Mass	✓	✓	✓	✓
Children's Masses	✓	✓	✓	✓
Family involvement	✓	✓	✓	✓
Communication (newsletters, social)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hospitality and welcome	✓	✓	✓	✓
Celebration of baptism anniversaries	✓	✓	✓	✓

Conclusion

The responses from these four parishes reflect a cohesive vision: that Baptism must be embedded in relationship, celebration, and continuity. These communities recognize that sacramental life cannot exist in isolation, and that intentional hospitality, formation, and involvement are essential to making Baptism truly the gateway into the life of the Faith community.

On the Eucharist.

1. Preparation Through Scripture

- Strong emphasis across all four parishes on preparing for Mass by reading and reflecting on the Scripture readings beforehand.
 - Ballinlough: Weekly prayer groups and Lectio Divina.
 - Blackrock: Suggests brief homily explanations of the readings.
 - Blackrock Road: Calls for both priests and parishioners to engage in reading and reflection.
 - Mahon: Recommends weekday reflection and teaching on the Eucharist.

2. Welcoming Atmosphere and Community Spirit

- Building a sense of **hospitality and belonging** seen as essential:
 - Warm welcomes at the door and end of Mass (all parishes).
 - Community gatherings post-Mass (Ballinlough, Blackrock).
 - Neighbourly connections within the church (Blackrock).
 - Acknowledging non-regular attendees (Mahon).

3. Lay Participation and Shared Responsibility

- Strong encouragement for active lay involvement:
 - Readers, music ministers, altar servers (Ballinlough, Blackrock, Mahon).
 - Greater use of lay ministries and small prep groups (Blackrock Road).
 - Mahon emphasized liturgical symbols and processions for community connection.

4. Music and Atmosphere

- **Music** is widely recognized as vital:
 - Congregational singing encouraged by all.
 - Music to uplift and enhance the atmosphere (especially in Blackrock and Mahon).
 - Joyful celebration of the Eucharist is key to evangelization.

5. Meaningful and Relevant Homilies

- Homilies should be:
 - Clear, relatable, and connected to everyday life (Ballinlough, Mahon).
 - Centered on the Eucharist's importance (Blackrock, Blackrock Road).
 - Contextualized with modern examples and stories.

6. Formation and Catechesis

- All parishes see **education and formation** as essential:
 - Ballinlough and Mahon advocate catechism, scripture study, and faith formation.

- Blackrock Road calls for parish-level education on preparation for Eucharist.
- Mahon suggests preaching about Eucharist as unity and love.

7. Visual and Symbolic Enhancements

- Use of physical signs, posters, and symbols to enhance understanding and presence of faith:
 - Ballinlough: Noticeboards and signs to anchor Mass in the local context.
 - Mahon: Suggests using symbols like enthroning the Bible, foot washing.

PARISH COMPARISON

Theme	Ballinlough	Blackrock	Blackrock Road	Mahon
Scripture Preparation	Very strong	Moderate	Strong	Strong
Welcoming & Hospitality	Very strong	Very strong	Moderate	Very strong
Lay Involvement	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Strong
Music & Atmosphere	Strong	Very strong	Moderate	Very strong
Homily Relevance	Strong	Very strong	Strong	Strong
Faith Formation	Very strong	Moderate	Strong	Very strong
Use of Symbolism	Moderate	Moderate	Minimal	Very strong

PARISH HIGHLIGHTS

- **Ballinlough** emphasizes spiritual preparation through prayer, discussion, and community reflection.
 - **Blackrock** highlights music, welcome, and community inclusion, with practical concerns like heating and sound systems.
 - **Blackrock Road** focuses on the need for education and catechesis for both clergy and laity.
 - **Mahon** champions symbolic acts and inclusive gestures to reinforce Eucharistic theology and communal unity.
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SUMMARY

The shared vision across these parishes is a Eucharist that:

- Is deeply understood, not simply performed.
- Is joyfully celebrated with music, welcome, and engagement.
- Involves all members of the parish as participants, not spectators.
- Prepares people to bring the message of Christ into the world.

On the Families of Parishes

1. Support Received from the Family of Parishes

- **Ballinlough:** Priest rotation and coverage are valued. Still early in developing a true collaborative identity.
 - **Blackrock:** Strong priest collaboration and shared ministries. Seen as a promising beginning toward unity.
 - **Blackrock Road:** Increased collaboration and lay involvement. Parishioners becoming more aware of the wider diocesan context.
 - **Mahon:** Positive comments on priest coverage, but lay interaction is still lacking and there's concern about reduced Masses.
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2. How Each Parish Supports the Family of Parishes

- **Ballinlough:** Involved through liturgical coverage, attending meetings, and providing backup priests.
 - **Blackrock:** Active participation in forums, ministry development, and shared facilities.
 - **Blackrock Road:** Offers logistical and liturgical support. Attends diocesan events and shares best practices.
 - **Mahon:** Cemetery Masses and occasional joint liturgies noted. However, a general need for more structured dialogue and involvement was expressed.
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3. Challenges Since Joining the Family of Parishes

- **Ballinlough:** Difficulty embracing the collective identity and initial discomfort with priest rotation.
 - **Blackrock:** Concerns over priest workload and structural limitations on lay leadership.
 - **Blackrock Road:** Struggling with smaller attendance and extra responsibilities; unique SMA identity noted.
 - **Mahon:** Loss of one-on-one relationships with priests; lack of communication with other parishes; calls for more gatherings.
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4. Celebrating Sacramental Life as a Family

- **Ballinlough:** Promotes shared celebrations, rotation of services, and laity-led prayer events.
- **Blackrock:** Emphasizes collaborative sacraments, music, youth inclusion, and accessible communication.

- **Blackrock Road:** Advocates for balance between parish identity and collective events (e.g., Marian procession).
 - **Mahon:** Calls for increased shared services and lay empowerment. Suggested quarterly family-wide Masses.
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5. Encouraging Youth Participation

- **Ballinlough:** Focused on children's liturgies, youth choirs, and creating welcoming, engaging spaces.
 - **Blackrock:** Honest appraisal of current struggles; suggested radical reform and deeper relationship building.
 - **Blackrock Road:** Education and empowerment after Confirmation. Making liturgies more meaningful.
 - **Mahon:** Utilizes Scala and school connections; advocates tailored Mass experiences and better outreach.
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6. Supporting Parish Ministries

- **Ballinlough:** Calls for regular reviews, education, and collaboration across parishes.
 - **Blackrock:** Recommends formation, training, shared roles, and youth inclusion. Advocates for reform in Church structure.
 - **Blackrock Road:** Suggested informal bonding and improved communication about roles.
 - **Mahon:** Identified urgent need for recruitment and training across ministries; many teams are inactive or under-resourced.
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7. Vision for the Next 5–10 Years

- **Ballinlough:** Hopes for stronger unity, active youth presence, and lay-driven sacramental and faith formation.
- **Blackrock:** Imagines a vibrant, lay-led, inclusive Church; emphasizes urgent need for structural change.
- **Blackrock Road:** Envisions a smaller, more intentional community with shared facilities and fewer open churches.
- **Mahon:** Expresses both hope and urgency. Advocates lay leadership, resource sharing, and regular consultation.