

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 St. Joseph's, Mayfield, Upper Mayfield and the Pastoral Care of Holy Family Church.

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. Welcome and Inclusion

A dominant theme across all Mayfield parishes is the need to **create a welcoming environment** for families bringing children for Baptism. This includes:

- Greeting parents warmly at Mass.
- Involving them in parish activities before and after the baptism.
- Public acknowledgment of newly baptised children during Mass or in parish bulletins.

Parishioners stress that the welcome must go beyond the ceremony—it should extend into the wider life of the parish, making families feel like they belong.

2. Integration into the Faith Community

Baptism is seen not as an end but a **beginning of faith life**. Many responses urge follow-up with families after baptism:

- Inviting them to family Masses.
- Creating groups for new parents.
- Involving them in ministries or parish groups.

There's a sense that Baptism should trigger **intentional efforts to integrate families** into the wider parish life.

3. Parental Formation and Understanding

There is consistent concern about **parents not fully understanding the meaning of Baptism**. Suggestions include:

- Pre-baptism catechesis.
- Reflection questions or booklets.
- Opportunities for parents to share their motivations and intentions.

This theme reflects a pastoral awareness that **Baptism is often cultural**, and parishes want to invite a deeper faith commitment.

4. Participation of Children and Families

Several responses highlight the need to **involve children in the life of the Church** after their baptism:

- Regular children's Masses.
- Allowing children to participate in readings, gift offerings, or altar service.
- Providing spaces and roles for families with young children at Sunday Mass.

The goal is to **make families feel comfortable and active** within liturgical life.

5. Baptism Within Mass

Many parishioners prefer **Baptism to take place during Sunday Eucharist** to:

- Emphasize its communal nature.
- Allow the parish to witness and welcome.
- Help families feel supported and celebrated.

This move is seen as a symbolic gesture of integrating the newly baptised into the faith community right from the beginning.

6. Ongoing Pastoral Connection

Some responses propose the formation of **“baptism teams” or “pastoral sponsors”** to build a relationship with families:

- Meeting before and after baptism.
- Offering spiritual support.
- Keeping families connected through parish events.

7. Youth-Friendly and Family-Friendly Church Culture

There is concern that young families often feel **excluded or embarrassed** at Mass. Suggestions include:

- Having child-friendly zones in church.
- Ensuring noise or movement from children is not frowned upon.
- Encouraging flexible, joyful liturgies that welcome families.

Comparative Summary Table

Theme	St. Joseph's	Holy Family	Our Lady Crowned
Welcome and Inclusion	Strong emphasis	Strong emphasis	Strong emphasis
Integration into Parish Life	Moderate	Strong	Strong
Parental Formation	Strong	Moderate	Moderate
Participation of Children	Moderate	Strong	Strong
Baptism During Mass	Moderate	Moderate	Strong
Ongoing Pastoral Support	Moderate	Strong	Moderate
Family-Friendly Church Culture	Moderate	Strong	Strong

Conclusion

The Mayfield parishes collectively view **Baptism not as a standalone sacrament**, but as the **gateway to full participation** in the life of the faith community. There is a desire for a welcoming, engaging, and reflective approach that helps families move from a one-day ritual to a lifelong journey in faith. The vision of a baptismal community is one of **shared responsibility, joyful celebration, and meaningful relationships**.

B. On the Eucharist

1. Welcome and Hospitality

All three parishes strongly emphasized the importance of a **warm, inclusive welcome**. Parishioners highlighted practices like greeting teams, friendly priests, and after-Mass gatherings as vital to making newcomers and regular attendees feel valued.

- **Holy Family** and **Our Lady Crowned** noted the positive impact of tea after Mass, informal chat spaces, and priest availability.
 - **St. Joseph's** emphasized the tone of welcome and the spiritual mindset entering the sacred space.
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2. Liturgical Participation

There was clear consensus that greater **involvement of parishioners** in the liturgy enriches the experience. This includes readings, music, and children bringing up gifts.

- **Holy Family** led in suggesting broad lay engagement—from preparing readings to decorating the space.
 - **Our Lady Crowned** encouraged full congregational singing and considered the role of readers and choirs as vital.
 - **St. Joseph's** called for deeper reverence and dignity in how roles are carried out.
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3. Youth and Family Involvement

All parishes recognized the importance of **engaging young people and families** in Eucharistic life. Specific actions like children's blessings, children's bulletins, and family roles during Mass were seen as essential.

- **Our Lady Crowned** celebrated practices like children's blessings and special events like family gatherings after Mass.
 - **St. Joseph's** pointed out the gap between school faith formation and actual Mass attendance, calling for family-based encouragement.
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4. Music and Atmosphere

Music was universally viewed as a **key enhancer of liturgical experience**, contributing to joy, reverence, and unity.

- **St. Joseph's** preferred traditional, reflective music such as Latin chant, seeing it as a marker of the Mass's seriousness.

- **Holy Family** and **Our Lady Crowned** favored joyful, community-driven music, with choirs highlighted as spiritually uplifting.
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5. Spiritual Preparation and Reflection

A strong theme across all parishes was the need for **personal and communal preparation before Mass**. This included silent reflection, explanation of the Gospel theme, and meditative space after Communion.

- **Holy Family** promoted reading the Gospel in advance and spiritual themes in newsletters.
 - **St. Joseph's** expressed concern about the rushed pace of the liturgy, requesting more time for contemplation.
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6. Short, Relevant Homilies

Respondents consistently asked for **concise, relatable homilies** that connect Gospel themes to real life.

- All parishes agreed sermons should be “to the point,” spiritually rich, and delivered in accessible language.
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7. Post-Mass Community Building

All three parishes saw **community connections beyond the Mass** as part of Eucharistic nourishment. Informal gatherings, sharing experiences, and social functions were noted as opportunities for deepening faith and friendship.

- **Holy Family** proposed outings and community chats after Mass.
 - **Our Lady Crowned** suggested family tea gatherings to reflect on what the Eucharist means personally and communally.
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8. Faith Formation and Catechesis

There was a shared understanding that **ongoing catechesis** is necessary to deepen Eucharistic understanding, particularly for adults and young people.

- **Lectio Divina groups** were highlighted by **Our Lady Crowned** as helpful tools.
 - **Holy Family** suggested spiritual messaging in newsletters and art displays by children.
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9. Media and Communication

Using digital media and creative communication was noted—especially by **Our Lady Crowned**, which praised the parish Facebook page for reaching a global audience and strengthening faith remotely.

10. Inclusivity and Pastoral Sensitivity

The final strong theme was the desire for an **inclusive and pastorally sensitive liturgy**. This included welcoming diverse age groups, recognizing different spiritual needs, and avoiding judgmental attitudes.

- **All parishes** affirmed the Eucharist as a unifying event where everyone should feel they belong and are spiritually fed.
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Conclusion

The Mayfield parishes envision a Sunday Eucharist that is **reverent yet joyful, communal yet reflective**, and above all, **transformative**. Priests and parishioners alike are called to prepare with intention, participate with heart, and share what they celebrate with others. Across all three parishes, the Eucharist is seen not only as the “source and summit” of faith but also as **fuel for mission and service in everyday life**.

C. On the Families of Parishes

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

- **St. Joseph's** felt supported mainly through individual priests, though there's frustration about lack of action and unclear communication.
- **Holy Family** appreciates the support from St. Joseph's and Our Lady Crowned, especially the priests. However, they feel **detached from St. Patrick's**, where their financial link remains, causing tension and confusion.
- **Our Lady Crowned** strongly credits their priests with making the model work. They recognize efforts in networking, shared resources, and pastoral presence. There's wide recognition of **priest workload pressure**, and a desire for long-term priest stability.

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

- **St. Joseph's** highlights the involvement of retired and active priests, and a willingness to work together despite challenges.
- **Holy Family** demonstrates initiative: organizing events (e.g. coffee mornings), attending meetings, keeping the church open six days a week, and requesting full integration with St. Joseph's and Our Lady Crowned.
- **Our Lady Crowned** reports high levels of collaboration, social integration efforts, shared meetings, and a strong desire to build relationships among the parishes. Their Pastoral Council is actively working to ease the burden on priests.

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

- **St. Joseph's** noted the **loss of continuity** due to priest transfers and significant pressure on remaining clergy.
- **Holy Family** struggles with **lack of clarity** about its place in the Family, financial issues, and absence of sacraments like baptisms. There is frustration over limited autonomy.
- **Our Lady Crowned** uniformly identifies **priest overwork** as the central challenge. They also worry about loss of personal connection during funerals and the sustainability of operations.

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

- **St. Joseph's** offers limited input, though one comment suggests more youth involvement.
- **Holy Family** proposes shared seasonal services and deeper collaboration.
- **Our Lady Crowned** suggests more inclusive liturgies, weekend baptisms, and broader sacramental planning. There is a push for **greater flexibility in church roles and ministry inclusion**.

5. How do we encourage younger people to participate?

- **St. Joseph's** emphasizes school outreach and parental involvement, acknowledging that without engaging parents, efforts may fail.
- **Holy Family** encourages **youth Masses, family events, and intergenerational involvement** including music and Alpha courses.
- **Our Lady Crowned** presents a wide range of efforts: youth choirs, blessings at Mass, school partnerships, involvement in readings and World Youth Day. There is also **frustration about public perception of the Church** and a call for outreach to show its positive impact.

6. How can ministries (e.g., Eucharist, RCIA, Alpha, etc.) be supported?

- **St. Joseph's** points to the need for training and the challenge of recruiting new people.
- **Holy Family** emphasizes cross-parish collaboration and recognition for lay volunteers. There's interest in **rotating ministries** and regular support.
- **Our Lady Crowned** calls for **training, coordination, and validation** of lay roles. They also advocate for more formal support structures, improved induction, and greater diocesan engagement.

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

- **St. Joseph's** seeks more **engagement from Bishop Fintan**, lay involvement, and priest stability. There is disillusionment over past consultation efforts and a **call for genuine listening**.
- **Holy Family** hopes for **continued operation, autonomy, and clear integration** into their preferred Family of Parishes. They express concern over uncertainty and loss of identity.
- **Our Lady Crowned** expresses **hope for lay leadership development**, sustained priest presence, and structural clarity. They call for **individual treatment of each Family's needs** rather than a one-size-fits-all model.