

REPORT OF ST JOSEPH'S PARISH SURVEY 2016: SHORTER VERSION

1. Questionnaires

1.1 In total, 203 questionnaires are included in the analysis of the survey. A total of 174 questionnaires were completed in full, with 29 where not all questions were answered.

2. Responses to Questions 1 to 13

2.1 Answers to Question 1 indicate that nearly one third of respondents are 65 years and over and about one in five are 30 year olds or younger. About 3 in 5 respondents have been with the parish for 10 years or more and 1 in 10 have been for over 40 years. Mass attended varies but the single highest attended (almost a quarter of the sample) is the 9.15am. The majority of respondents (80%) are registered with the parish.

2.2 Over 85% of respondents 'strongly agree' or 'agree' that *the newsletter and website are a valuable source of information* (Q2). Almost 90% replied similarly that they *feel welcomed and included in Mass* (Q3) and 83% are equally positive that *the parish makes sufficient efforts to involve adults in Eucharist celebrations* (Q5). A lower 70% of respondents are positive that *the music at Mass helps them to participate* (Q4), which leaves about 30% disagreeing or at best non-committal. Most of these are in the 66+ age group. Just over 55% replied positively that *the parish makes sufficient efforts to involve young adults and older children - other than altar servers - in Eucharistic celebrations* (Q6), which contrasts sharply with that for adult involvement.

2.3 Nearly 2 in 5 of respondents *would like to be able to attend sessions for prayer and scriptural instruction to deepen their faith* and would do so if these were regularly scheduled.

2.4 Nearly 2 in 3 respondents think that *newcomers are actively welcomed when they join the parish* (Q8). This is a fairly positive response but it suggests that some parishioners may feel there is room for improvement. Just over 2 in 5 respondents think that *sufficient efforts are made to discover parishioners' talents and invite their use in parish service* (Q9). A number of factors, such as family and work responsibilities may influence responses here and it is difficult to interpret the data. However, about 43%

respond that they 'neither agree or disagree' or 'don't know'. This may suggest that many are unaware of what is done in this area.

2.5 Similarly, positive responses to Q10, Q11 and Q12 (about 59%, 62% and 54% respectively) relating to *knowledge of, and participation in, parish groups and activities and supporting those in need within and outside the parish* are also difficult to interpret. However, there appears to be less positivity here than in most other areas.

2.6 Only about one half of respondents feel that they receive enough information about the parish's finances, resources and refurbishment issues (Q13). Around 35% disagree, neither agree nor disagree or don't know.

3. What do we do well as a parish?

Welcoming and greeting

3.1 The large majority of responders think that the parish community is kind, very welcoming and inclusive not only to parishioners but also to visitors and newcomers. It also successfully includes all ages from young children to older people. Some also mention the strong sense of community, sense of belonging and real sense of parish that they enjoy. Some express a great love for the parish and the community - it is a wonderful parish to be a part of.

Services

3.2 People are generally positive in their feelings about Masses. They talk about celebrating the Eucharist; the creation of an environment of peace within the building; reverent and meaningful experience; sharing their faith; family Mass working well, especially for young families; and make many other similar comments. People like the frequency and convenience of services, such as having 5 Masses at the weekend and daily during the week. They like the coming together at Easter and Christmas and think that the services then are well carried out. They welcome the occasional special Masses, such as 'One Mass' and 'Mass for bereaved parents'. Respondents feel that the liturgy is always appropriate; that homilies are usually good, inspiring and make people think; that teachings during Mass are done to such a high standard that people are encouraged to accept God. We have good readers. Those commenting about music, singing and the

choir think the parish provides good and enjoyable music, particularly at the 9:15am and 5pm Masses where they say it is excellent.

3.3 There are positive comments focused mainly on preparation for Sacraments, for example, that there are quality programmes for First Communion/Confirmation/Journey in Faith/Baptism. Talks are of high quality and well attended and efforts to involve parents in First Communion and Confirmation are much improved. Journey in Faith is particularly strong and there are groups for all ages and different levels of faith development.

Clergy and parish team

3.4 People think that the parish is well run and organised as is the parish office itself. Respondents comment on a clean and well maintained church - with lovely flowers. Susan in the office is extremely knowledgeable and is always very helpful and efficient. We have very caring and supportive priests and pastoral team. One parishioner summed this up by saying that the pastoral team and parish secretary are approachable, friendly, helpful and welcoming. A number of people thank the priests and the whole parish team for the wonderful work they do, their care and consideration, support and leadership and their considerable work to serve all the members of our numerous and diverse parish. Finally, another says that St. Joseph's has become a much closer community over the last 10 years.

Social activities

3.5 A small number comment on social activities and events as well as group activities that there are lots of activities and individuals involved feel very welcome. These help to bring people of similar interest together, offer opportunities for social gatherings and create a lot of people involvement and cooperation. These and others like the music groups, parish groups like VCM, neighbourhood groups, family groups and efforts to make parishioners more sociable are welcomed, as are all the different groups that get together with food and drinks. Special events such as outings to holy places are also welcomed.

Social action and broader community

3.6 Others have positive comments about the parish visiting the sick and housebound and bringing communion to those unable to attend Mass. They value also the mutual support between the church, school and family; helping one another; and supporting those in need in the community. Comments suggest that this is seen as happening more within

the parish rather than the wider community, although supporting CAFOD is mentioned as something we do well by all respondents.

Involvement of youth and young adults

3.7 There are positive comments about involving the younger parishioners through the children's Mass/Liturgy, as well as involving children in altar services and reading. One parishioner notes 'the fine job of supporting our successful Catholic primary school' and another comments that 'the scouts and guides are strengths' in a parish without a state Catholic Secondary School.

Communication

3.8 Other respondents comment that the parish does well in communicating and advising parishioners about the activities taking place in the parish, what's happening through the week, about the various support groups and distributing material to facilitate full participation.

4. What could we do better as a community?

Welcoming and greeting

4.1 A number of respondents think that the greeting and welcoming could be improved. One parishioner comments on a perceived lack of commitment from 'welcomers'. Another says that it actually doesn't work and it seems to be about handing out leaflets. Everyone needs to be acknowledged and greeted, perhaps by name rather than the simple 'good morning/evening' and the handing out of the newsletter. There is some suggestion that the members of the PPC are not well known, that they should be more proactive and, specifically, that they should be 'welcomers' at the Masses they attend. On welcoming to visitors and newcomers, there is a suggestion that a notice could be put near the church door addressed to all new parishioners and visitors to show that they are very welcome. Another suggestion is for a welcome group to meet newly registered members of the parish to let them know what goes on and how they can get involved. Yet another suggestion is that, before final notices at Sunday Mass, the priest should enquire who is new or visiting and with a microphone welcome them. This might better engage new parishioners and encourage them to become a real part of the parish. **AP1: Consider what more might be done to enhance the welcoming and greeting experience.**

Services

4.2 A number of parishioners seem to think that services can be rather long and sometimes include too many 'add-ons' that elongate a normal Mass without warning, for example, Christenings, RCIA inductions, Confirmation, which should have their own specific service. Others call for different sorts of masses, for example, for people who are busy and need a smaller mass or more simple basic Masses of no more than 1 hour duration that are reflective but joyous and concentrate on basic Christianity and quiet prayer. One parishioner suggests that a long homily is not needed during the daily mass, especially when the deacons preach, while another comments that the homilies are well delivered but sometimes too long and too political. Some want more homilies on moral issues, faith and prayer – 'prayer is the key to our parish becoming truly alive'.

4.3 Some respondents would like more singing in services/more lively music and traditional well-known hymns to encourage participation by the congregation and to make services even more enjoyable, especially at the 11am Mass where the music is not always good. There is a whole litany of other comments and suggestions about the conduct and arrangements around Mass. To illustrate but some: priest to give parents a gentle reminder of the church etiquette to stop children running around and eating during the Mass; altar servers should shake hands with the congregation when doing the sign of peace (as seen in a church in Poland); people with coughs and colds should not shake hands during sign of peace; altar service rota needs updating as some never serve; servers could be adults with regular change of faces; better organisation of Communion rather than a long queue down the aisle; Eucharistic Ministers have to dress properly/giving real Jesus to our brothers and sisters; read out any special notices during collection time rather than before the final blessing; unnecessary to read out the newsletter from the altar; reading of the entrance antiphon and Communion antiphon are often inaudible to the back of the Church; publish response to the bidding prayers in the newsletter, as sometimes hard to remember and many other such comments.

4.4 Parishioner requests include more opportunities for evening prayers, Mass, Vespers and Benediction from time to time; more prayer events with adoration of the Blessed Sacrament; more healing/blessing services with social/ tea afterwards; occasional Tridentine/sung Latin Mass, children's Masses (or separate instruction during the adult Mass); devotion to Mother Mary has to increase with each Holy Eucharist. **AP2: Consider**

the merits of suggested changes to Mass arrangements and other services and introduce where appropriate.

Faith development and education

4.5 There are a few negative comments around faith development and education: don't do missions again because they were 'too heavy' and tended to put people off the church; sacramental preparations are too long with too many rituals; the degree of parental involvement in FHC and Confirmation should be reduced - it is meant to be about the children and their journey. One parent felt more alienated from the church because First Holy Communion preparation placed unreasonable demands on his/her time and because of the requirement to discuss his/her faith publically. Another says that, rather than making them feel involved, 'it put the children (and me) off'. On the other hand, one parishioner suggests creating 'a structure for parental commitment to the Catechist programme' which would involve post FHC (or earlier) parent feedback on whether they would look after a small group of children for one year. There is also a suggestion that trained and highly skilled Catechists are needed to lead and facilitate the training programmes. **AP3: Review the arrangements for sacramental preparations with a view to improving procedures and encouraging greater parental commitment.**

4.6 There are also a number of more positive comments and suggestions outside of sacramental preparations to help parishioners learn more about their faith and encourage them to continue in their journey in faith. These include: opportunities for sharing our own meaning of faith with others; bible study for both children and adults; forums for discussion, meetings, etc. particularly for young adults/those finishing university or training to explore/re-engage with their faith; having more parish groups focusing on specific aspects of Catholic social teaching, more engagement in positive ecumenism, encourage and promote vocations to the priesthood and religious life. The positive comments here reflect those given in answer to Q7 about sessions to deepen faith. **AP4: Consider the possible options for setting up groups or sessions for prayer and scriptural instruction to sustain and deepen parishioners' faith.**

Clergy and parish team

4.7 Respondents suggest that there should be better dialogue and a little more friendliness from priests towards the older parishioners, not just newcomers. Some think that there is little understanding from clergy and catechists of the demands of modern

family life. One parishioner says 'There could be more appreciation and welcome for what we do manage to do rather than feeling judged or criticised for what we do not (e.g. comments in church about families not being in Mass)'. Under 'What's missing altogether', there are suggestions that a third priest is absolutely necessary - some call for the return of Father Charles. This would free up more time for the priests to support those who really need their help. Another respondent thinks there is nothing missing: '*I think we are very lucky to have two priests and two very active deacons, so I don't think there is anything missing. They all do a great job*'. There is huge support from parishioners generally for the pastoral team and the criticisms here are from a tiny minority. Obviously, the pastoral team may give some thought to these suggestions but an action point here does not appear to be necessary.

Volunteering and involvement

4.8 There are a number of suggestions put forward about volunteering and involvement. We need more parishioners to get involved in volunteering; to gather knowledge about individual strengths/skills of parishioners (this comes across also in the answers to Q9 above); to ensure that volunteers have the skills to do the job. One specific idea put forward is for volunteers from the legal profession to offer their services free of charge once a month (like St. Edmund's in Beckenham). Perhaps a newsletter item could invite parishioners to register their experience and skills. **AP5: Identify what more could be done to discover parishioners' experience and skills and invite their use for the benefit of the parish.**

4.9 Some say there is a lack of unity and interaction between parishioners irrespective of the weekend mass they attend and that parishioners are merely turning up to Mass but not engaging with other, contrary to the ethos of the church. So, respondents say that there should be more focus on fostering and developing family groups, more communication between groups (one respondent says that, after Journey in Faith, the parish groups do not intermingle) or combining groups doing the similar activities. In this respect, some want more information about what goes on behind scenes, the work of parish groups and how to join. Another suggestion is that all known Catholics in the parish should be invited annually by Visiting Teams.

4.10 There are a number of other suggestions from single individuals to increase the sense of community. These include: more involvement from the nuns; more links between parishioners and clergy to develop a mutual understanding of each other's priorities and pressures; occasional visit from a priest; support and work together with the parish and to engage individually; be more inclusive of LGBT; know others by name; recognise by name those helpful over many years etc. **AP6: Consider what steps could be taken to increase parishioners' knowledge of, and participation in, parish groups and activities.**

Involvement of youth and young adults

4.11 A lot of respondents made suggestions about finding ways of getting youth involved and keeping them in the community. These chime with the answers given to Q6 above about the involvement of younger people in Eucharistic celebrations. They say that those (aged 5 to 16 years) should be involved more with the Church, whether this is through a youth club, youth events or other fun activities. One parishioner suggests that families with kids who don't go to St. Joseph's be included and another that the parish should reach out to the youth of all schools, even if not Catholic. Some ask for more to be done to encourage younger people who have lapsed to come back to Church. There should be a separate Youth Mass organised on Sunday; a shorter Mass for children; making services more attractive to youth who often 'disappear' from Sunday Mass; involving teenagers and children in more activities during Mass and getting younger children to do the occasional reading.

4.12 A young respondent suggests that the parish should include people in groups after Confirmation is over because, otherwise, there is little opportunity to see or spend time with others who received the same sacrament. There is a suggestion for a Post Confirmation Group to meet this need. Other suggestions are that the parish needs to find a way of being more youthful and vibrant; have more relevant involvement, using services tailored to youth realities and language such as homilies and music meaningful to their lives. Specifically, one 12 year old suggests '*make sure people applying to become an altar server get a place, as I applied in Year 2 and got in end of Year 4*'. Another 12 year old proposes drama workshops to show the Gospel during Mass and for one 13 year old the priority is to '*learn about our faith in fun ways*'. **AP7: Consider what steps could be taken to increase the involvement of the youth, young adults and older children in Eucharistic celebrations and in the parish community.**

Social activities

4.13 All respondents seem to feel that the social side of life is missing in the church. They call for more social events and activities to enable engagement with other parishioners of all ages (with a special mention of meetups for single people aged 30 upwards) and to create a stronger more encompassing social life. One respondent's priority is to revitalise the Social Club. Further suggestions include a raft of ideas: visits out; more picnics; more meet-ups; link-ups for different interests, such as walking, sewing, sport, reading etc.; more retreats; more pilgrimages like going to Aylesford and Walsingham and other places of interest; and church-based activities, such as reviving the Mother Teresa of Calcutta group for elderly parishioners, getting together with St. Patrick's quizzes, lunches in the Hall to unify groups, a monthly whist drive, after Mass coffee and tea, parents to meet up in children's service and a Mass for the community when the weather is nice. **AP8: Consider whether there is scope for the parish to develop and add to its current social events and activities.**

Social action and the broader community

4.15 A number of respondents want us to do more in reaching out to the poor and disadvantaged in the broader community in practical ways, evangelising with actions rather than words. The work already being done by Latch and SVP is acknowledged but it is suggested that we set out more of the parish's outreach work so people are more aware of how they can help or get involved. We could do much more as a parish community, such as outreach to Bromley Town, promoting the food banks more and having a monthly collection from the church or a dedicated area for food bank offerings, and helping poor local people and those with mental health or anxiety problems. Working with other churches is also a focus and we should include activities and meets for non-religious or non-Christian people. More widely, respondents call for more collective action on key issues like: refugee support; bi-monthly refugee collection (as at St. Edmund's); action on poverty and discrimination; more information on non-African charities as Africa dominates our giving and, finally, to partner with another community in a vulnerable part of the world. **AP9: Consider how the parish might expand its social action in the broader community and encourage more involvement from parishioners.**

Communication

4.16 Although answers to Q2 indicate that the huge majority of respondents value the newsletter and the website as a source of useful information, there are some suggestions

for improvement. Firstly, the spread of answers to Q2 indicate that younger parishioners may be less enthused about it and indeed that is reflected in younger requests to make it user-friendly to teenagers, make it clearer and highlight the important news. One parishioner speaks of 'an exaggerated piousness in newsletters'. Another asks for inclusion of diary details relating to activities/visits the priests have carried out through the week. Other suggestions are for a more up to date website and Facebook/Twitter pages, with links to other organisations. **AP10: Consider what steps could be taken to improve the parish newsletter and website and target them better at a wider parishioner audience.**

4.17 People would also like to have information on the Parish Council and how it works, and information cascaded down about the decisions taken by it on our behalf. They would welcome too information on events and activities outside St Joseph's and in other parishes. There are suggestions of a leaflet, or a space at the rear of the church, for pictures of recently deceased parishioners, so that a name can be coupled with a missing face in the community. One respondent suggests a plan for the future of the parish should be communicated to get people involved, including proposed actions as a result of this survey itself. **AP11: Consider whether to make available, and by what means, miscellaneous information on the Parish Council, deceased parishioners, and future plans etc.**

Church environment

4.18 There are some quite specific points raised around the church premises and facilities: the sound and microphone system needs replacing (this is seen as important and a priority); refurbish kitchen or have a new larger kitchen in parish centre (break through to bar) and improve storage and stage; install a water fountain; hall needs to be refurbished; better musical storage and moveable chairs (the choir constantly have to move heavy benches) and more power points /plugs in the choir area; open up church foyer or front of church to provide an area of congregation after Masses; extend confessional wall to allow a larger Church for fewer Masses; create a physical space for parents to take noisy children but still feel included in Mass. **AP12: Explore the feasibility and affordability of replacing the sound system and making other suggested improvements to the church environment.**

Finance

4.19 There is mention of the lovely new carpet but calls that people should know how much it cost so that it can be appreciated more. One respondent asks for an account in the newsletter of what is taken in the 'Needy Box' and what is used for on a periodic basis. Almost half of those responding to Q13 above on whether they receive sufficient information on the parish finances, resources and refurbishment issues reply 'disagree', 'neither agree nor disagree' or 'don't know'. **AP13: Consider whether to publicise more widely where parish financial and other administrative information is available.**

Summary

5.1 The respondents have indicated that their top priorities for the parish are:

- continue to grow the parish community to be warm, welcome and vibrant, with a strong sense of belonging;
- encourage volunteering and involvement of parishioners in parish life
- increase involvement of older children, youth and young adults in parish life;
- more opportunity for worship through Mass and other services;
- grow faith development and education;
- expand social action locally and in the broader community;
- procure an efficient and effective sound and microphone system.

5.2 These priorities are fully embedded in all the comments and suggestions made by the respondents to this survey. Because of their sheer number and diversity, it is simply not possible to mention all of the comments and suggestions in this shorter version of the survey report. However, it is hoped that there is more than enough here to reflect and encapsulate the views, the general mood and the aspirations of those committed parishioners who took the time and trouble to make their contributions.

List of action points

1. Consider what more might be done to enhance the welcoming and greeting experience.
2. Consider the merits of suggested changes to Mass arrangements and other services and introduce where appropriate.
3. Review the arrangements for sacramental preparations with a view to improving procedures and encouraging greater parental commitment.

4. Consider the possible options for setting up groups or sessions for prayer and scriptural instruction to sustain and deepen parishioners' faith.
5. Identify what more could be done to discover parishioners' experience and skills and invite their use for the benefit of the parish.
6. Consider what steps could be taken to increase parishioners' knowledge of, and participation in, parish groups and activities.
7. Consider what steps could be taken to increase the involvement of the youth, young adults and older children in Eucharistic celebrations and in the parish community.
8. Consider whether there is scope for the parish to develop and add to its current social events and activities.
9. Consider how the parish might expand its social action in the broader community and encourage more involvement from parishioners.
10. Consider what steps could be taken to improve the parish newsletter and website and target them better at a wider parishioner audience.
11. Consider whether to make available, and by what means, miscellaneous information on the Parish Council, deceased parishioners, and future plans etc.
12. Explore the feasibility and affordability of replacing the sound system and making other suggested improvements to the church environment.
13. Consider whether to publicise more widely where parish financial and other administrative information is available.