

January 2025

Dear Parents / Parishioners,

First of all, thank you so much to everyone who filled in the survey regarding the 'Future of our Faith'. On behalf of the steering group (consisting of representatives from all the parishes) we wanted to feedback to you on the findings.

The information that we gathered was vital in supporting us to begin to plan for the future; ensuring we are taking into account the needs and views of parishioners, pupils and parents across our area of the Diocese.

Whilst all parishes and deaneries have been called to review what the future of their local Church looks like, this was the first time that a deanery had conducted research in this way. The response was overwhelming: collectively across all groups we were able to ascertain the views of nearly 1600 people. This gives us a wonderful foundation on which to begin to plan what the future needs to hold for our local Church over the coming years.

As with any survey, the results have highlighted causes for concern but also rays of hope and has reminded us of lots of things that we can be proud of. It is common knowledge that across our local diocese – and indeed the whole country and wider – we are faced with smaller numbers of people attending Mass but we are confident that if we make the right steps forward, there is much hope for the future of our faith.

What do people want from the Church moving forward?

- Music
 - More up to date hymns
 - Live music
- More involvement of children in Mass
- Children's Liturgy groups / Activities for children
- Social events – enabling the church to be the heart of the community through gatherings, charity events and social action
- Homilies and teachings with more relevance to 'now' / to the congregation /and the struggles the community face
- More interaction from priests, schools and across / between parishes.
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Are you Proud to be a Catholic?

Despite falling numbers at weekly Mass it was amazing to how much pride people had to be Catholic seen in all groups surveyed.

<i>Group</i>	<i>% of group who are proud to be Catholic</i>
Parishioners	96%
Parents	94%
Primary pupils	96%
Secondary pupils	95%

Taking action

Again another overwhelmingly positive aspect was how many people were interested in taking action on some of the areas highlighted around Catholic Social Teaching.

Over 60% of those who completed the survey said they would consider being part of a group to tackle some of the issues pertinent to them – what scope for change!

Finally, as we have entered the Holy Jubilee year as 'Pilgrims of Hope', we need to remain hopeful and optimistic that the Holy Spirit is alive in our part of the Diocese. It is easy to be negative and focus our attention on dwindling numbers attending Mass at our churches. However, we must remain positive and see that in isolation we may seem vulnerable but collectively we remain strong in faith.

What next?

In the coming months and years, we will continue to press forward with our work in the steering groups in order to review and implement ideas and information gathered through the survey.

We leave you with this question.....

What does being a Catholic mean to you?

Take a moment to reflect on how you would answer this before reading some of the responses below – which have been taken from the survey results:

'It means having a relationship with God. He is someone I can turn to when troubled instead of keeping things to myself. I can clear my mind'

'Showing devotion to God by reflecting on the teaching and life lessons presented by Jesus in the Bible, living a morally good life and being kind enough to show empathy towards others'

'Being a Catholic means to have faith in God and follow his teachings and to be the best version of ourselves and even though if someone needs help that we don't like, we still help them and this links to the story of the Good Samaritan'

'It means that I can spread the word of God and I can have a relationship with a power much greater than me. Someone that I can put my trust in and confide in at my lowest'

'Being a Catholic means love and compassion for other people, kindness and loyalty, spreading the word of God and being a proud Catholic'

'Believing in God and treating everyone with love, respect and dignity – no matter who they are'

'Belief in God and to know he has a plan for me and that if I follow his teachings and the right path, I know I can have eternal life with God in my afterlife'

All of the above statements were written independently by pupils at John Henry Newman. This proves that despite our worries and concerns about the future of our faith, it is very much alive in our young people.

Collectively we now need to work together to nurture this and keep our faith strong.

Yours sincerely,

Cluster steering group