

Future Directions Working Group

Parish Survey Report

May 2025

Overview

This report presents the results of a comprehensive parish-wide survey conducted by the Future Directions Working Group (FDWG) at St. Carthage's Parish between 5–25 April 2025. The goal was to capture a snapshot of community life, assess pastoral and liturgical needs, and inform future directions considering demographic shifts and recent leadership changes.

The report is organised into three sections:

1. Summary of Key Findings

This section provides a synthesised summary of core insights derived from both structured data and free-form responses. Topics covered include:

- Demographic Profile
- Pastoral Needs
- Leadership and Administration
- Church Space Use
- Mass Attendance Trends
- Liturgy and Music
- Finances
- Future Direction

2. Individual Responses (97 total)

Each participant's anonymised full survey response is recorded in this section. These entries preserve the integrity and nuance of each parishioner's contribution, offering a detailed view of individual perspectives.

3. Free-Form Response Cross-Reference Table

This section contains a structured, searchable table of all open-ended responses, grouped by survey question. Each response is tagged with a unique **Response ID** linking directly to its original full entry in Section 2. This cross-reference system enables:

- Aggregated community sentiment analysis by question/topic
- Quick identification of representative comments
- Easy navigation between community trends and individual context

This tool is particularly useful for gauging community views such as the effectiveness of technology in the liturgy, the community's desire for direction, mergers and parish leadership models.

Purpose and Intended Use

This report has been prepared for the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) and Finance and Property Council (FPC) to review in advance of the proposed joint meeting between the FDWG and PPC/FPC, during which the FDWG recommendations will be presented.

We strongly encourage members of the PPC and FPC to study this report in detail ahead of that meeting to ensure a well-informed, productive dialogue and shared understanding of parishioner views.

Future Directions Working Group

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10th May, 2025

1. Summary of FDWG Parish Survey Findings (May 2025)

Key Demographic Insights

- 82% of respondents are aged 60+
- Parish includes diverse family structures: ~20% in mixed/civil unions or remarried; 10% religious; 10% widowed
- Under-50 representation is low (~10%)

Attendance and Engagement

- Strong core of weekly attendees
- Sunday 10am Mass now dominant; some disengagement since 5pm Mass was discontinued
- Departure of former parish priest noted as a key factor in attrition

Pastoral Needs and Inclusivity

- Older members feel generally supported
- Under-50s seek child-friendly liturgies, youth programs, and contemporary music
- Identified gaps: grief support, inclusion of divorced/remarried Catholics, better newcomer welcome and integration

Liturgy and Music

- Music highly valued across age groups; strong preference for live performance
- Older parishioners prefer organ and hymns; younger prefer piano/guitar and contemporary songs
- Desire for balance between tradition and modernity

Homilies and Technology

- Perceived decline in homily quality (23% drop from when respondents first joined)
- Mixed feedback on homily relevance
- PowerPoint use is very polarising

Parish Leadership and Governance

- **Pastoral Council** rated positively (avg. 4.01/5) but needs greater visibility
- **Finance Council** highly rated (4.27/5) with calls for transparency
- **Administration** scored lowest (3.80/5); newsletters and communication need improvement

Finances and Giving

- Only ~40% use planned giving/direct debit
- Barriers include cash preference, financial insecurity, and trust issues
- Tap & Go option supported by some but resisted by older members

Use of Church Space

- Many support expanded weekday use (e.g. concerts, lectures, outreach)
- Some older members prefer sacred-only use
- General agreement on maintaining spiritual integrity of the space

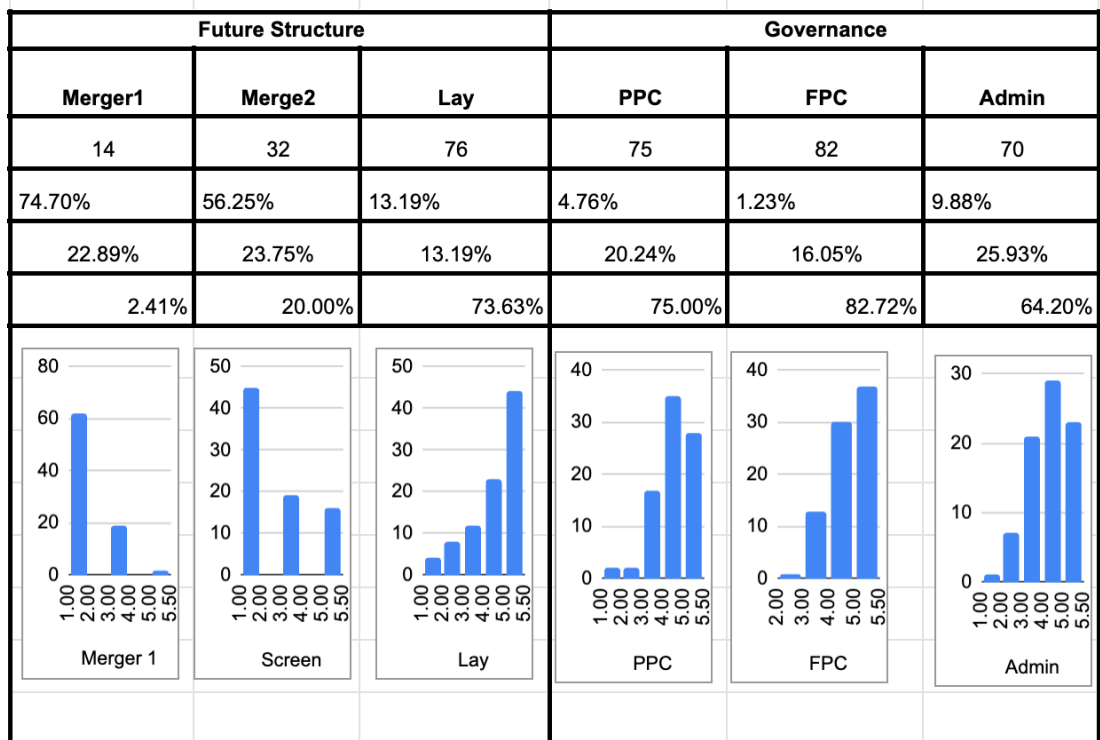
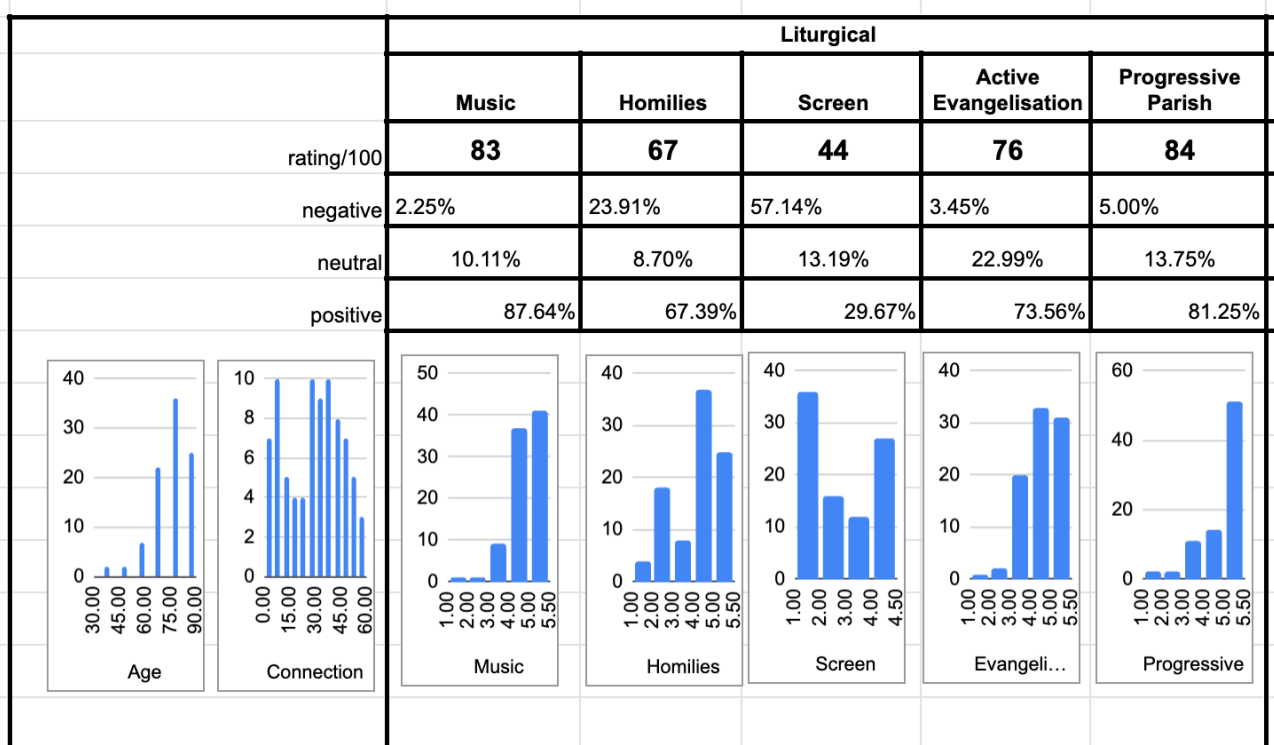
Parish Mergers and Identity

- **Strong opposition** to merger with St Mary's (Opus Dei-led)
- **Mixed views** on Cathedral merger—some openness, but concern about identity loss
- Clear preference for a **lay-led partnership model** with VG support

Future Direction and Values

- Broad consensus toward a **progressive** direction for the parish
- Top-ranked community priorities:
 1. Social justice, intellectual engagement, and community
 2. An inclusive, socially engaged Catholic identity
 3. Stronger roles for women in leadership

1.1. Data Summary



1.2. Detailed Data Summary

Responses:

Total Responses: 97 out of 140 active parishioners (67% participation rate)
Digital submissions: 82
Paper-based: 15

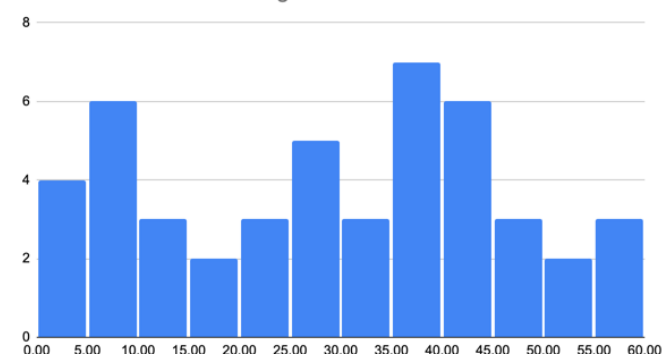
Average Parishioner Profile:

Age: 72
Tenure: 28 years
Travels: 24 km weekly to attend

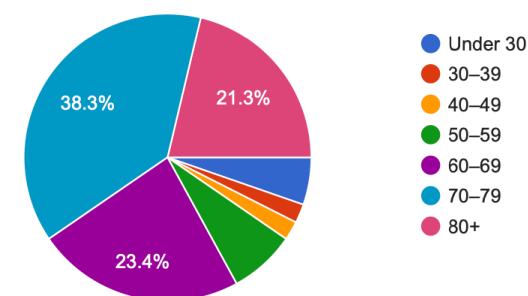
Demography

The survey data reveals that St. Carthage's congregation is predominantly older, with 61% aged 60–79 and 21% aged 80+, reflecting long-standing ties to the parish (many arrived in the 1980s–1990s).

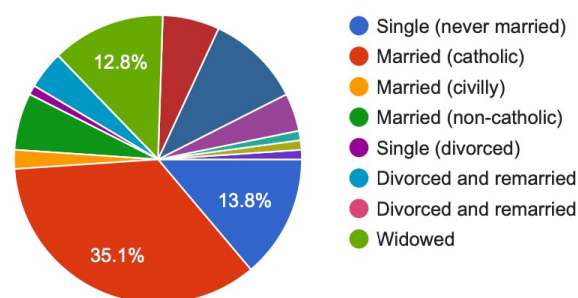
Connection with St. Carthage's



The largest group consists of married Catholics, but the data also highlights meaningful diversity: 20% are in mixed-faith or civil marriages, divorced and remarried or committed relationships. Additionally, approximately 10% are consecrated religious (nuns, brothers, priests), and 10% are widowed.



Composition by age

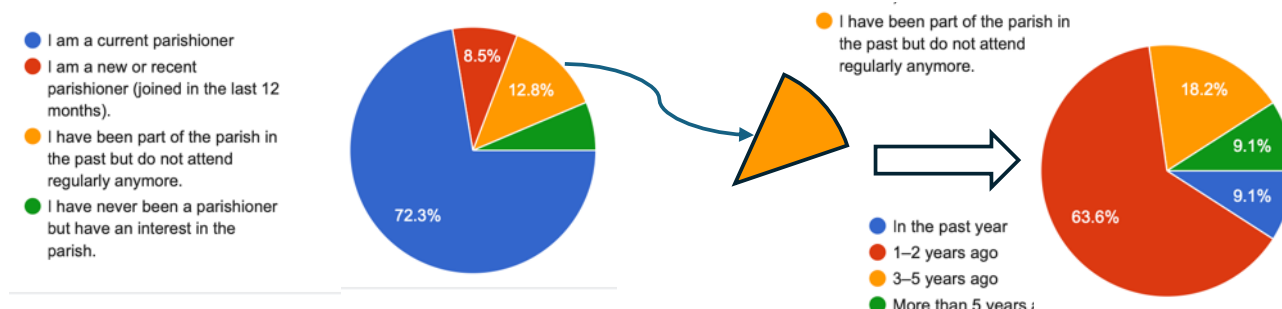


Relationship Status

While younger members (under 50) are underrepresented (just 10%), the presence of non-traditional marital statuses—such as divorced, remarried, or non-Catholic spouses—suggests pastoral realities that extend beyond the Church's conventional demographics.

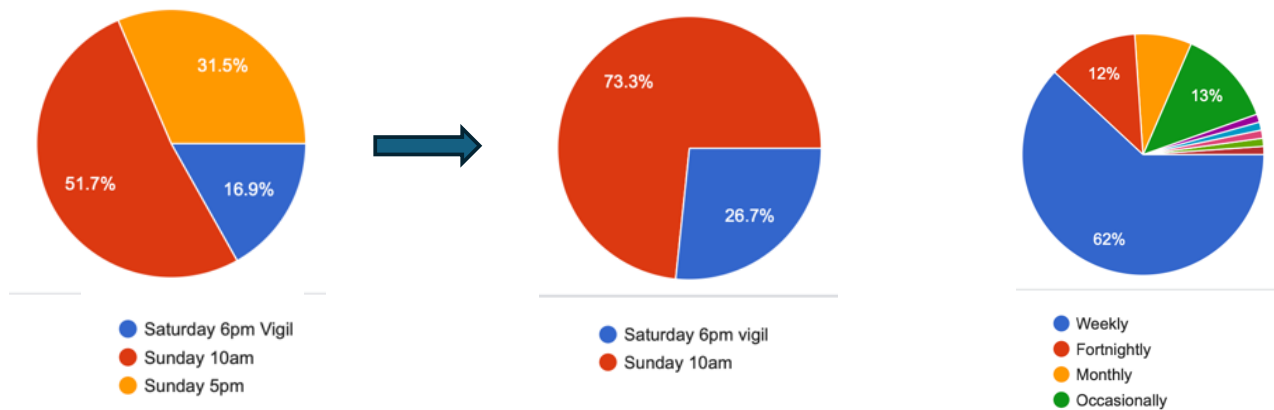
The overall trends emphasise an aging but varied congregation, where inclusivity remains an important consideration.

Connection



The data reveals a predominantly stable core of current parishioners (75-80%), with notable attrition among former members (~15%), driven largely by leadership changes—particularly the departure of Fr. Michael Elligate. New members (~8%) signal hope for renewal.

Attendance



Attendance Trends (Past vs. 2025)

Sunday 10am seems to have absorbed most former 5pm attendees, suggesting it's now the "default" Mass. General observations on the frequency of attendance in 2025:

- Weekly - Strong core group
- Fortnightly - Often due to lifestyle (e.g., splitting time between locations).
- Occasionally/Monthly: Some cite changing habits post-COVID or dissatisfaction with liturgical changes.
- Stability of Saturday Vigil: Those who prefer it remain consistent ("Saturday 6pm Vigil → Weekly").

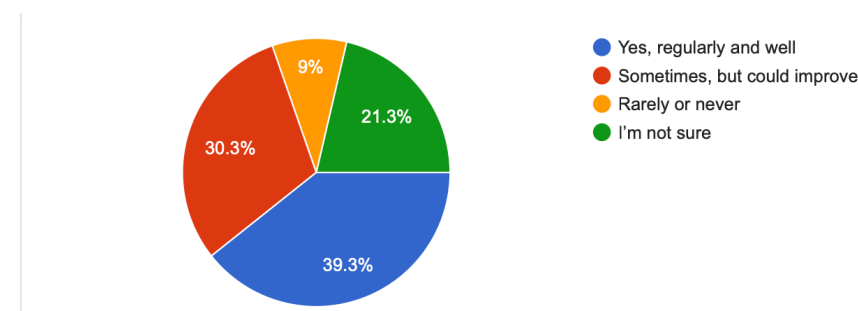
Impact of Discontinued 5pm Mass: The data suggests successful consolidation around Sunday 10am and Saturday Vigil, but also highlights a minority who've disengaged due to changes.

Pastoral Needs

Respondents were then asked two optional questions:

1. If comfortable sharing, how could our parish better support someone in your situation?
2. Do you feel our parish currently acknowledges/ministers to people in your situation?

General Observations



Most respondents are aged 60+ and there are far fewer responses came from younger age groups. Many praise the meaningful Masses, rituals, and reflective environment. Older respondents, especially 70+, often

feel well-supported. There is an appreciation for asking about needs (e.g., "care is being taken to ask"). Overall, the satisfaction levels are mixed on whether the parish acknowledges/ministers to their needs.

- "Yes, regularly and well" was frequent among older age groups (especially 70+), indicating strong satisfaction with current pastoral care.
- However, the response "Sometimes, but could improve" was a common critical response, highlighting areas for growth.
- "Rarely or never": A minority, but notable in cases like grief support, inclusivity (e.g., divorced Catholics), and social integration.

Key Themes by Age Bracket

Under 50's

- Youth groups and activities (e.g., "Supporting a youth group to carry out events").
- More child-friendly liturgies (e.g., "fewer big words," "modern hymns").
- Support for young families (e.g., "Children's Ministry").

50–69

- Spiritual Depth: Complex sermons, 21st-century relevance ("bring the message into the 21st century").
- Social/Practical Support: Grief groups, social activities (e.g., "cafe meetups"), and better integration of new members.
- Inclusivity: Criticism of canon law lectures, exclusion of divorced/remarried Catholics.
- Polarized—some praise the parish, while others report feeling isolated (e.g., a story of being ignored at a social event).

70+

- Liturgical Quality: Meaningful rituals (e.g., Last Supper reenactments, "rewarding liturgy").
- Community: Welcoming new members, social connections ("weekly friendly contact").
- Inclusivity: Calls to end discrimination (e.g., against divorced Catholics).
- Practical Support: Transportation (e.g., "driven to Mass"), use of microphones.
- Social Justice: Calls for "tolerance, humanity, and understanding" in global issues.

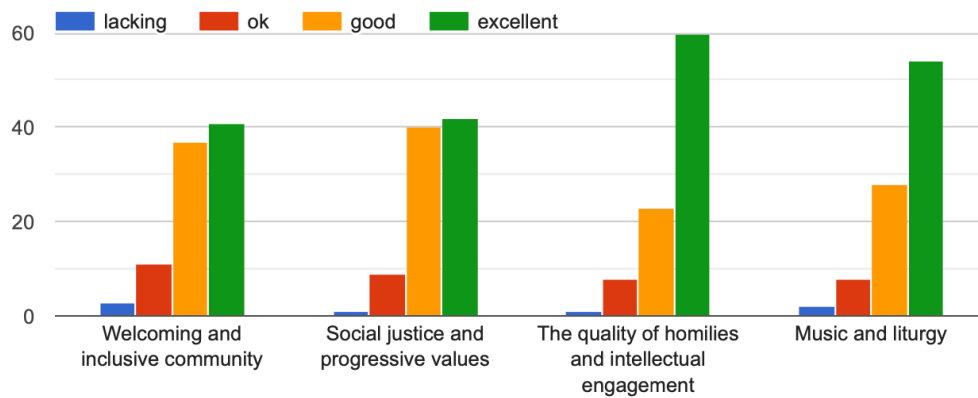
Recurring Points

1. Inclusivity: Divorced/remarried Catholics, younger members, and newcomers feel excluded.
2. Liturgy: Requests for modernization, child-friendly options, and deeper theological engagement.
3. Social Support: Gaps in grief support, senior/young adult activities, and integration efforts.
4. Communication: Need for better announcements (e.g., St. Vincent de Paul updates) and clearer use of technology (e.g., microphones).

Rating on Issues

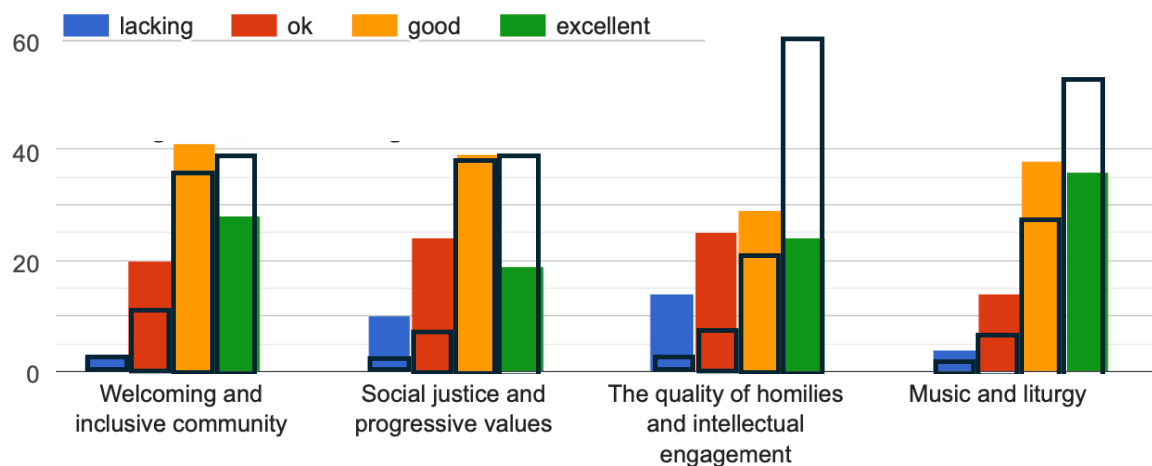
Respondents were asked to reflect between when they joined and 2025 and then asked to rate the church on these issues:

1. Welcoming and inclusive community
2. Social justice and progressive values
3. The quality of homilies and intellectual engagement
4. Music and liturgy



St. Carthage's "when I joined"

As shown above, the survey reveals a generally positive view of St. Carthage's Church when respondents first joined, with high ratings for its welcoming community, music, and liturgy. However, perceptions in 2025 show notable declines, particularly in social justice and the quality of homilies, with many older and middle-aged members (50–69) downgrading their ratings to "ok" or "lacking." Younger members (Under 30 – small sample size) remain highly satisfied, while those aged 70+ tend to retain positive views, albeit with some exceptions. The church's welcoming atmosphere and liturgical music remain relative strengths, but the data suggests a need to address engagement on social justice and intellectual issues to recover broader appeal across age groups.



St. Carthage's "in 2025"

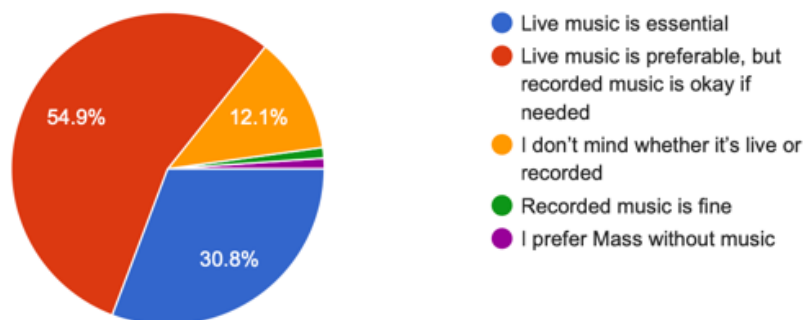
(The **changes** from previous "when I joined" are indicated in **black**)

Category	Rating when joined	Rating in 2025	Change
Welcoming and inclusive community	82%	76%	7 % decrease
Social justice and progressive values	83%	68%	18% decrease
The quality of homilies and intellectual engagement	88%	67%	23% decrease
Music and liturgy	86%	79%	8% decrease

Note: Converting qualitative ratings (e.g., "excellent," "good") into a numerical scale (e.g., 4, 3) allows for objective comparison of past and present perceptions of St. Carthage's Church, highlighting trends like the declines in social justice or homily quality. While this approach simplifies analysis and reveals demographic patterns, it assumes equal intervals between ratings—a limitation that can be mitigated by pairing scores with qualitative insights. The method provides a clear, data-driven snapshot of change while acknowledging the need for contextual interpretation.

Music Preferences:

Across all age groups, music is highly important (rated 4-5/5) to the Mass experience at St. Carthage's, with most parishioners strongly preferring live music for its authenticity and communal spirit. Preferences are diverse: older members (70+) favour traditional hymns with organ, while younger attendees lean toward contemporary styles with piano/guitar, though both groups value choir-led and congregational singing. The data underscores a need to maintain live performances while balancing traditional and contemporary selections to cater to multigenerational worship.



Live vs. Recorded Music

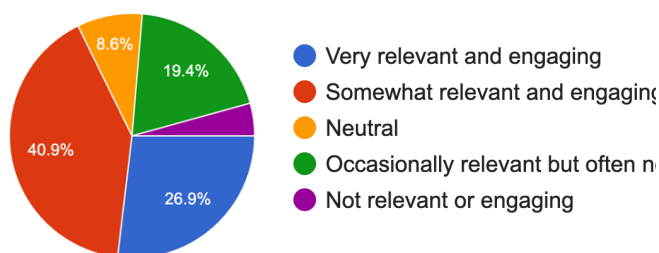
There is a strong preference for live music:

- 60%+ insist live music is "essential" or "preferable", citing it as vital for worship's authenticity and communal spirit.
- Flexibility: Some (mostly 70+) accept recorded music if necessary, but live is ideal.
- Neutral Minority: ~15% (across ages) "don't mind" live or recorded.

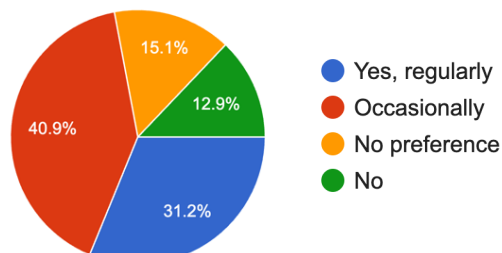
Homilies

Parishioners were invited to reflect on their experience of homilies at St. Carthage's. The survey explored four key dimensions:

1. Relevance & Engagement – How effectively homilies connect faith to daily life
2. Priority Elements – The aspects most valued (e.g., scriptural depth, social justice links)
3. Desired Variety – Interest in guest speakers or communal reflection opportunities
4. Suggestions for Change – Practical ideas to enhance delivery and impact



How relevant and engaging do you find the homilies at St. Carthage's?



Would you like to see more reflections or guest speakers as part of the homily or post-homily discussion?



What aspects of a homily are most important to you?

The questions about homilies at St. Carthage's received mixed reviews, with older parishioners (70+) generally finding them more relevant and engaging, while middle-aged (60–69) and younger attendees often desire greater depth or modern relevance.

Key priorities include relating Scripture to daily life, theological insight, and social justice themes. A recurring critique is the overuse of technology (e.g., PowerPoint), which many find distracting. Suggestions for improvement include ditching screens, incorporating guest speakers, and fostering more interactive reflection.

While some appreciate traditional delivery, others seek shorter, more conversational, or lay-led homilies. Balancing scriptural depth with contemporary relevance—and reducing reliance on visual aids—could enhance engagement across generations.

Use of Screen and Power Point

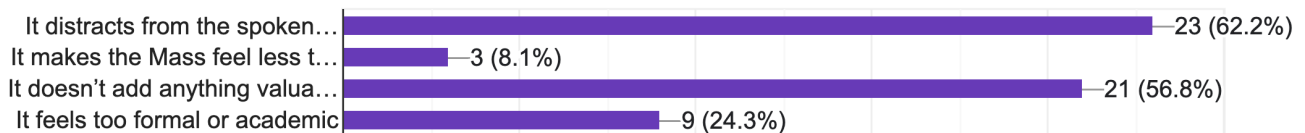
As part of St. Carthage's ongoing efforts to evaluate worship practices, parishioners were asked to share their perspectives on the use of PowerPoint slides and screens during Mass. Specifically, respondents were surveyed on:

1. their general feelings about PowerPoint during homilies,
2. any concerns they had about its use, and
3. whether screens could serve other practical purposes in liturgy—such as displaying hymn lyrics, prayers, readings, or announcements.

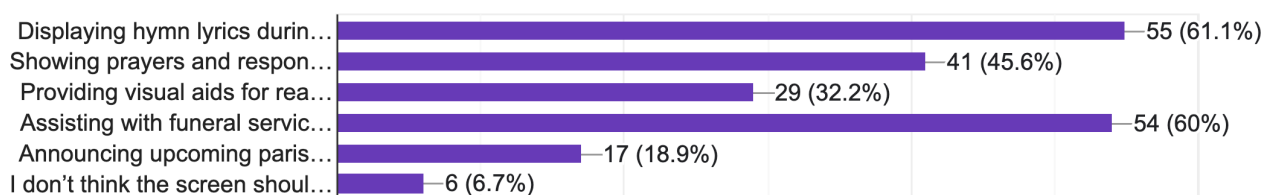
The goal was to gauge whether current screen usage aligns with the community's needs or if adjustments might better support participation and reverence.



How do you feel about the use of PowerPoint slides during homilies?



What concerns do you have about using PowerPoint in homilies?



Would you find the screen helpful for any of the following?

The use of PowerPoint and screens during homilies at St. Carthage's is deeply polarizing, with clear generational divides. Older parishioners (70+) overwhelmingly oppose them, calling screens "distracting" and "untraditional," while younger attendees (under 50) find them helpful for engagement, particularly with hymns and prayers. Middle-aged respondents (50–69) are split, criticizing poor design but acknowledging practical uses like funeral tributes.

Across ages, the only consensus is limited acceptance of screens for funerals and hymn lyrics. However, without audio support this will limit functionality.

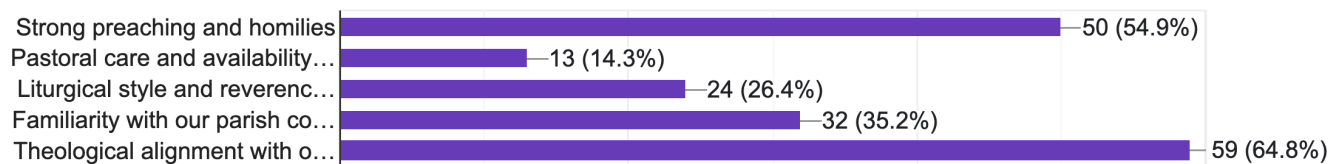
Visiting Priests

To better understand parishioner preferences when St. Carthage's requires visiting priests, respondents were asked four key questions:

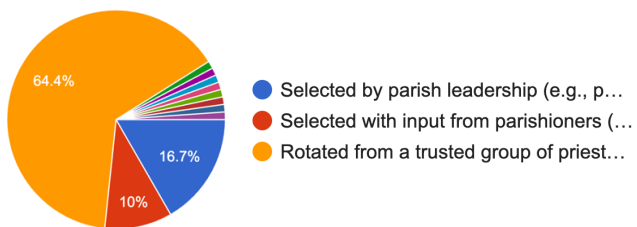
- **Qualities in a Visiting Priest:** Identifying which attributes (e.g., preaching, pastoral care, liturgical style) matter most when the pastor is unavailable.
- **Selection Process:** Exploring whether parishioners prefer rotation from a trusted group, leadership selection, or parishioner input.
- **Parish Familiarity:** Gauging how important it is that visiting priests understand St. Carthage's community and traditions.
- **Reception of Jesuit Priests:** Assessing openness to priests from the Newman Community, given their potential availability.

These questions aimed to balance practical needs with theological and communal values, ensuring visiting clergy align with the parish's identity while meeting diverse generational expectations. The responses reveal both consensus and tension, particularly around tradition versus flexibility in worship leadership.

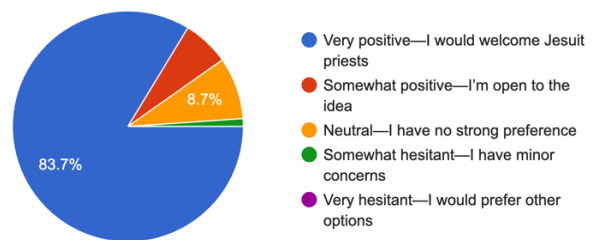
St. Carthage's parishioners overwhelmingly prioritize strong preaching and theological alignment in visiting priests, with older members (70+) especially valuing liturgical reverence and parish familiarity. Most prefer a rotated group of trusted priests (e.g., Jesuits), though younger attendees are more open to diverse selection methods. Jesuit priests are widely welcomed (82% approval), but some older respondents stress the need for briefings on parish practices.



Preferred Attributes



Selection Process



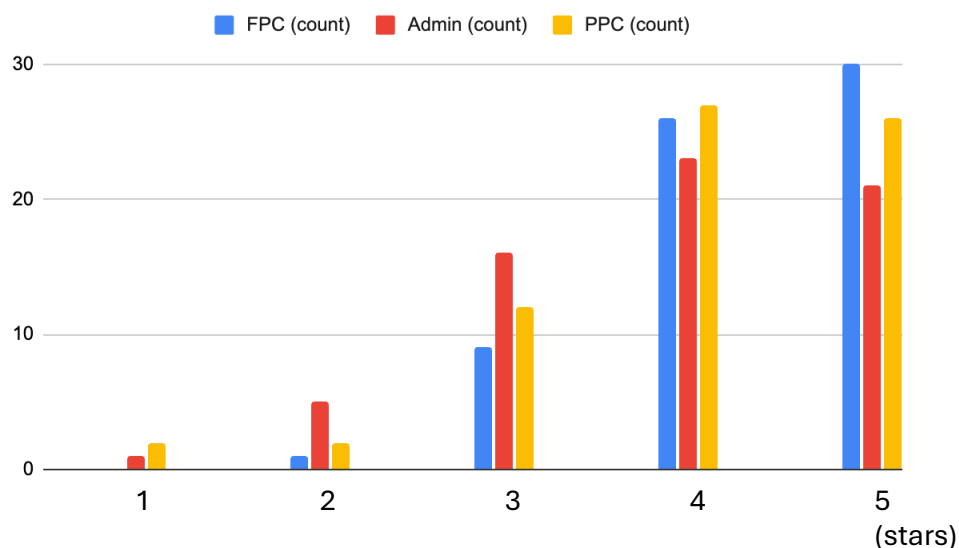
Jesuits

Parish Admin and Councils

To assess parishioner satisfaction with St. Carthage's leadership structures, respondents were asked to evaluate three key groups:

1. PPC - the Pastoral Council (spiritual and community leadership),
2. FPC - the Finance Council (financial stewardship), and
3. Admin - Parish Administration (day-to-day operations).

Each was rated a 5-point scale and suggestions for improvement invited.



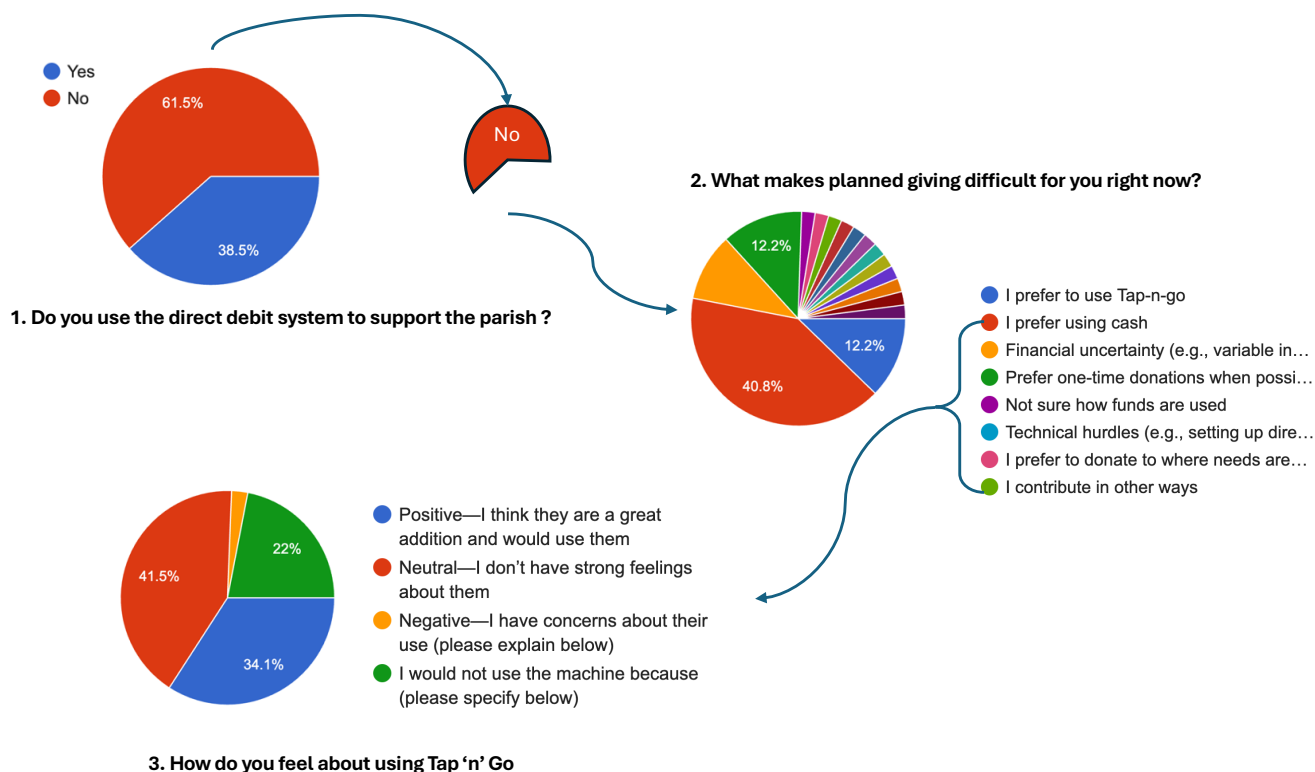
The results reveal strong appreciation for the councils’ dedication, alongside clear opportunities to enhance transparency, communication, and visibility—particularly around financial decisions, pastoral priorities, and parish governance. This analysis highlights generational perspectives, recurring themes in feedback, and actionable steps to align leadership with the community’s evolving needs.

Group	Stars	Score	Top Critique
Pastoral Council	4.01	75.3	Need more visibility
Finance Council	4.27	81.8	Publish the finances
Admin	3.80	70.4	Improve the newsletters

To determine the most common critiques, a qualitative analysis was conducted. All open-ended responses were first categorized into recurring themes (e.g., communication, transparency, visibility) based on keyword patterns and explicit suggestions. The frequency of each theme was then calculated to identify which issues appeared most frequently across responses.

Finances

To assess parishioner engagement with St. Carthage’s financial stewardship programs, respondents were asked four key questions: (1) whether they use the planned giving/direct debit system, (2) to identify barriers to regular giving, (3) how the parish could better communicate fund usage, and (4) their views on introducing Tap ‘n’ Go terminals for collections. The anonymous responses reveal generational divides in payment preferences, concerns about transparency, and practical challenges in adopting digital giving methods. This analysis highlights opportunities to increase participation in planned giving, enhance trust through clearer communication, and balance tradition with innovation in donation methods to serve all age groups effectively.



Planned Giving Participation

Low Adoption: Only ~40% of respondents use planned giving/direct debit, with participation highest among 70–79-year-olds.

Barriers:

- Preference for cash (45% of non-users, especially 60–69 age group).
- Financial uncertainty (20%, e.g., variable income, fixed pensions).
- Trust issues: Some cited difficulty setting up direct debit or lack of follow-up ("My arrangement expired and wasn't renewed").

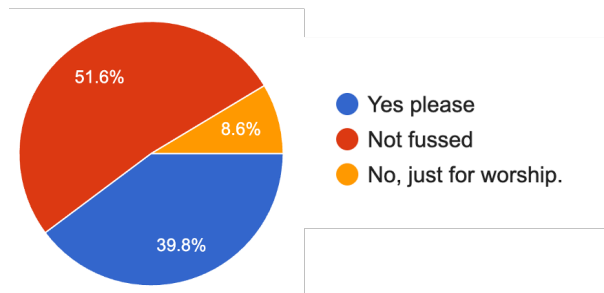
Tap 'n' Go Terminals - Mixed Reception:

Support (35%): Younger attendees (<50) and tech-comfortable older parishioners call it "necessary for cashless society." Resistance (40%): Older groups (60+) prefer cash due to security concerns or "anti-machine prejudice." Neutral (25%): Open to idea but need clarity on usage ("How would it work during offertory?").

Use of the Church space.

To explore how St. Carthage's might better serve its community, parishioners were asked two key questions:

1. whether they would support expanding the use of parish facilities beyond weekend worship and sacraments, and
2. for specific suggestions about weekday activities that would benefit both the parish and wider community.



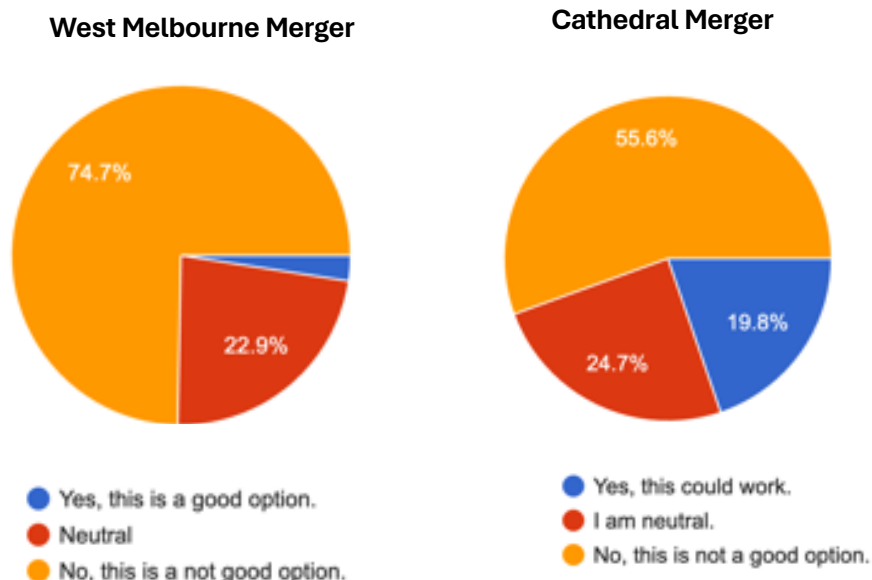
The responses reveal a clear generational divide, with strong interest from middle-aged members (particularly 60-69 year-olds) in cultural events and community gatherings, while some older parishioners prefer maintaining the space exclusively for sacred use.

Many creative proposals emerged - from concerts and lectures to prayer groups and social outreach programs - nearly all emphasizing the importance of preserving the spiritual character of the space.

- Cultural events (concerts, lectures - 22 mentions)
- Community gatherings (social events, discussion groups - 18)
- Educational programs (theological talks, scripture classes - 12)
- Prayer/reflection spaces (9)
- Revenue-generating rentals (7)

Mergers

The survey invited members of the St Carthage's community to reflect on potential future directions for the parish, including the possibility of a merger or closer collaboration with another parish. Respondents were asked to consider two specific options presented at a parish forum: a merger with St Mary's West Melbourne—entrusted to Opus Dei clergy—and another with the parishes under the pastoral care of St Patrick's Cathedral. Participants were also encouraged to share their preferences regarding different approaches to collaboration, and to identify the key values and aspects of St Carthage's that they believe should be preserved in any future arrangement.



The survey responses revealed a deep commitment among parishioners to the unique identity and mission of St Carthage's. While a range of views were expressed, there was a strong preference for maintaining the parish's inclusive character, its connection to the University of Melbourne, and its long-standing tradition of thoughtful liturgy and music. Many respondents voiced concerns about aligning with parishes led by Opus Dei, citing theological and pastoral differences. Others were more open to collaboration with the Cathedral parishes, though often with significant reservations. Overall, the community expressed a clear desire for

any future arrangement to preserve the parish's culture of welcome, academic engagement, and lay participation.

Merging with St. Mary's

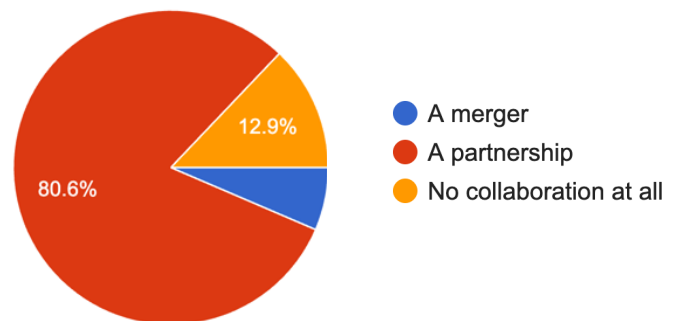
- Overwhelming Opposition:
- Strong concerns were raised about Opus Dei's theological conservatism, lack of inclusivity, and mismatch with St Carthage's values (e.g., social justice, academic engagement, and inclusivity).
- Language like "dangerous for our children", "against everything we stand for", and "would be a disaster" highlight the emotional and values-based opposition.
- A few responses expressed neutrality or support, but these were rare and sometimes conditional.

Merging with the Cathedral Parish

- More Mixed but still mostly negative or neutral:
- Some viewed it as "viable" or "could work", especially if it's not too directive and allows St Carthage's to maintain some independence.
- Others expressed similar concerns as with St. Mary's: fear of loss of identity, and a desire to avoid a top-down institutional structure.

A Lay Driven Partnership model: As part of a wider conversation about the future direction of St. Carthage's, respondents were invited to reflect on the parish's identity, leadership structure, and potential pathways forward. The following questions sought to gauge whether individuals felt the parish should lean more towards a traditional or progressive model, and to explore views on the possibility of an engaged lay leadership team working in partnership with the Vicar General. Participants were also asked about their preferences for collaboration and invited to share any thoughts, concerns, or ideas they felt were important to consider.

1. In your opinion, in which direction should St. Carthage's aim towards - a traditional church or a progressive one ?
2. How would you feel about a partnership model where an engaged lay leadership group takes responsibility for parish life, with the Vicar General providing support and oversight ?
3. Please share any thoughts, concerns, or ideas you have about such a model.
4. A final check, if collaboration were necessary, what kind of relationship would you prefer?



Partnership Model

Key Observations:

Direction:

- The majority of respondents (especially in the 60+ brackets) selected 4 or 5, indicating a preference for a progressive direction for the parish.
- Very few selected 1 or 2, meaning that traditionalism is not widely favoured.
- This suggests that the community strongly leans toward a more progressive vision, at least among those who responded.

Preferred Model

- The "partnership" model (with lay leadership supported by the Vicar General) received overwhelming support.
- There were a few calls for a "merger", but this was less common.

- Only a handful of respondents (often those who selected 1–2 on the progressive/traditional scale) wanted “no collaboration at all” — reflecting either a strong commitment to clerical leadership or a deep concern about the viability or authority of a lay-led model.

Evangelisation:

This survey explored parishioners' understanding of and comfort with evangelisation through four key questions:

1. whether they lean more toward proclamation-focused evangelization (bringing people to conversion/Mass) or action-oriented evangelization (serving the poor/kindness);
2. their gut reaction to the phrase "We must evangelise!";
3. their emotional response when asked to evangelize; and
4. preferences for alternative terminology.

The questions reveal tensions between traditional and contemporary understandings of evangelization, with many respondents emphasising social justice over conversion efforts, and some expressing discomfort with the term itself due to perceived associations with proselytization. This data highlights the need for nuanced language and approaches that align with the community's values of inclusivity, service, and intellectual engagement.

The Shape of St. Carthage's

This section presents the findings of a weighted prioritisation exercise where parishioners were asked to select and rank their top three values for St. Carthage's future. Using a points-based system (3 points for first priority, 2 for second, and 1 for third), the survey quantified the community's collective vision across six key areas:

1. Inclusivity – A Mass that intentionally welcomes all (e.g., progressive families, LGBTQ+ individuals, marginalised groups)
2. Tradition – A reverent, more ritual-focused Mass
3. Family – A Mass timed and styled for families (e.g., homily for (grand?) children, vibrant music)
4. Identity – Preserving the unique character of St. Carthage's identity
5. Modernising – A Mass designed to attract newcomers (e.g., more contemporary music, guest preachers)
6. Pragmatism – A mass time that draws the highest attendance

Results

This weighted methodology provides nuanced insight into how the community envisions balancing St. Carthage's cherished values with the practical realities of parish life in a changing world. The following analysis breaks down these priorities across generational groups and suggests pathways for honouring the parish's distinctive character while responding to evolving needs.

Priority	Votes
Inclusivity	270
Identity	225
Family	110
Pragmatism	100
Modernising	76
Tradition	35

As part of ongoing efforts to enhance parish life, respondents were invited to share their perspectives on potential improvements. The survey presented a list of ideas and asked participants to select up to three they believed would most benefit the community. The options ranged from fostering social justice and inclusivity to practical changes in liturgy and leadership structures. This feedback provides valuable insights into the congregation's priorities, revealing a strong desire for a more engaged, equitable, and communal parish.

The top 3 choices were:

1. A place where social justice, intellectual inquiry, and community are at the heart of its mission.
2. A socially engaged, inclusive, and progressive Catholic parish
3. A church which welcomes stronger role for women in leadership

