

Pastoral Area 21 Parish Survey Summer 2008

Report compiled by Caroline Shevelan on behalf of the PAWG

The survey was coordinated by Caroline Shevelan

June Helps

Ted Burgess

Matthew Hathersall

Alan Whitty



Acknowledgements

This survey would not have been possible without the help and support of many people. In the first instance we would like to thank you the parishioners who took the time to fill in the survey sheets every week for four weeks. It was a tedious task but necessary and we have gained valuable information from carrying out this survey. The coordination of the survey over the same four weekends required a good deal of cooperation with and from the clergy and the parishioners that represent you on the Pastoral Area Working Group. To both these groups of people we offer our sincerest thanks.

Significant help was received for the members of the Leigh Pastoral Area Working Group when we designed the original survey and we are grateful for their help, and for the help of the people who turned out in December to help collate the data onto spread sheets.

We would also like to thank our immediate families for putting up with endless cardboard boxes and piles of paper; we could not have done it without you.

Results

Introduction

In summer 2008 the Pastoral area Council (now the Pastoral Area Working Group PAWG), conducted a survey of the thirteen parishes in our area. The data was collected to give us a picture of the Pastoral Area as a whole and to find out; where and when people were going to Mass; how loyal people were to a particular parish, and what would be the likely outcome of a change in Mass times. The PAWG was also interested in how you feel about certain issues, e.g. What makes you choose the parish you have chosen?

In addition to this, the results of the survey will help us to look to the future of our Pastoral Area and plan for the changes which will soon be upon us. Leaving Safe Harbours is the Bishop's call to us, the laity and clergy together, to be responsible for the future of the church in this area. The data collected in the survey will allow us to make more informed choices about our future growth and development: choices that will have taken into account the majority view of the parishioners currently attending Mass in our Pastoral Area.

To begin with this document will clarify the data collection and analysis so that the survey can be replicated in the future. The report will then go on to present the results for the pastoral area as a whole. For individual parish results, please see the Pastoral Area website or your PAWG representative. This will be followed by a portrait of a 'typical parish' within the pastoral area.

The Data

Data was collected by administering a questionnaire, over four weekends, in the thirteen parishes of the pastoral area. The questionnaire (Appendix 1) consisted of fifteen questions and the data from these was collated onto an EXCEL spread sheet. (For a detailed explanation of how this was done, see Appendix 2).

After some deliberation and review by a statistician, it was decided that the data was not suitable for statistical analysis. Instead, comparisons, averages and percentages adequately illustrate the data. It was our intention to compare our results with the national averages but on consultation with the Archdiocese it seems that such data does not exist either within the Archdiocese or Nationally. The only statistics available were for over all Mass attendance within the Archdiocese and figures for those people who say they are RC.

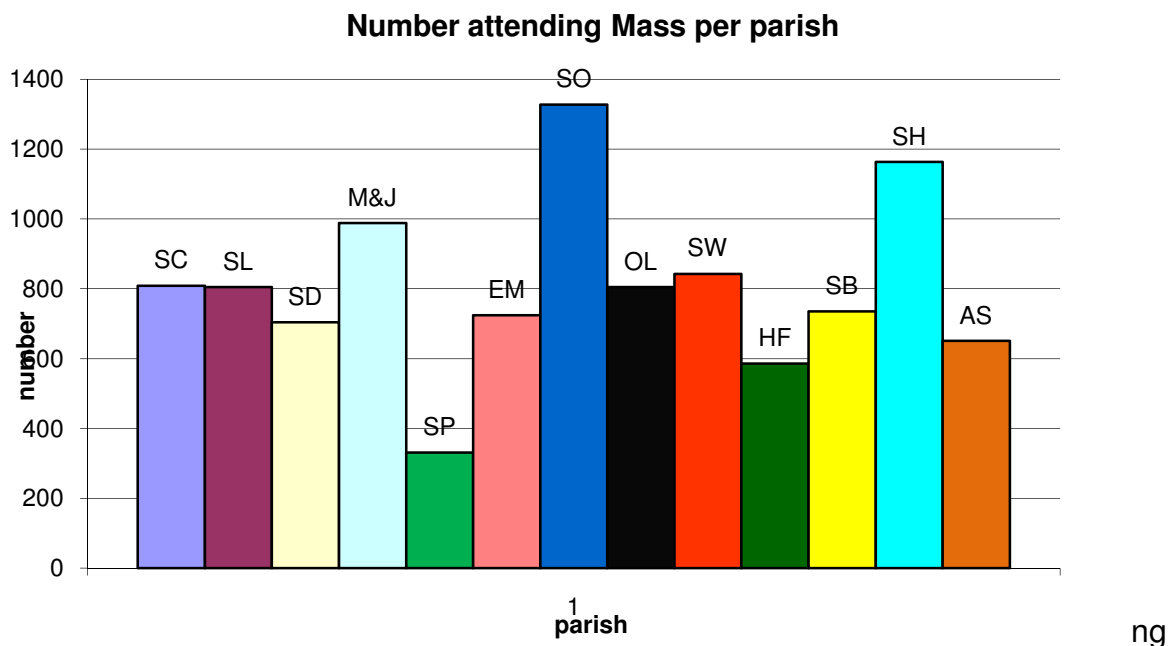
It will be possible to compare the data within this report with the data from individual Parishes from the end of March 2009. By this time PAWG representatives will have a copy of the data for your parish which will give you some information on which to base future decision making.

The Questions

The questions were decided upon after consultation with Leigh Pastoral Area. They are several steps ahead of us in the process of leaving safe harbours and conducted a similar survey a couple of years ago. The questionnaire was designed by adding questions to and adjusting the Leigh PAWG questionnaire to ask the questions we wanted to ask. Each question will be examined in turn looking at the reason for its inclusion, the results obtained for the Pastoral Area as a whole, and examining the potential impact of the answers obtained on future decision making.

Question 1 Church/Time of Mass

This question was used to determine how many people were attending Mass in each Parish and in the PA as a whole. This is important not only from the point of view of our effectiveness as a church in our local area, but also in practical terms. As the number of priests declines over the coming years, Masses will have to be moved and possibly merged. As we can only get so many people into a church at any one time, numbers are important. It is no good merging two Masses that are packed to standing



SC=St Catherine's. SL=St. Lewis. SD=St. David. M&J=SS. Mary and John. SP=St. Patricks. EM= English Martyrs. SO =St. Oswald's. OL =Our Lady's. SW =St. Wilfrid's. HF= Holy Family. SB = St. Benedict's. SH = Sacred heart. AS = All Saints)

Overall 10,472 people attended Mass in the thirteen parishes over the four weekends an average of 806 people per parish over the four week period.

In 2005 the Catholic population of the Archdiocese was 500,000, there are 24 pastoral areas in the Archdiocese, so it can be estimated that there are 20 – 21,000 Catholics in our Pastoral area who could attend Mass every week (LSH 2005). While we don't want to get too hung up on numbers attending Mass, (quality is much more important than quantity), such a large discrepancy points to a serious problem in our service to our local communities. We are failing to reach out to people who need to hear God's message for them.

One of the core challenges of Leaving Safe Harbours is to reach out to those people who would call themselves Catholic, but who are not part of a Catholic community. Can we proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in our local area? Might it even be possible, through prayer and with God, to bring people into our communities and into relationship with Christ so that the questions for the next survey will be 'what are we going to do with all these people?'

Question 2 Which Parish do you live in?

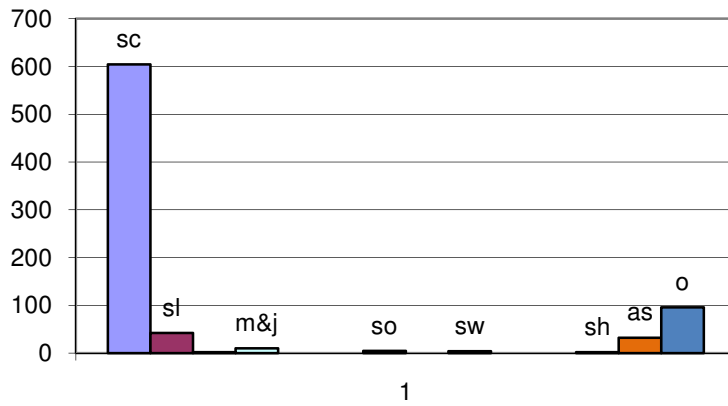
It was felt in the survey steering group that some people were attending a different Parish to the one whose boundaries they actually lived in. Some maybe coming from outside the Pastoral Area, or from a different parish within the pastoral area and there may be important reasons for this.

There is not room in this report to address the results of every parish so we have chosen to concentrate on one cluster which best illustrates the trends within the Pastoral Area. For detailed results of each parish please see the Pastoral Area website.

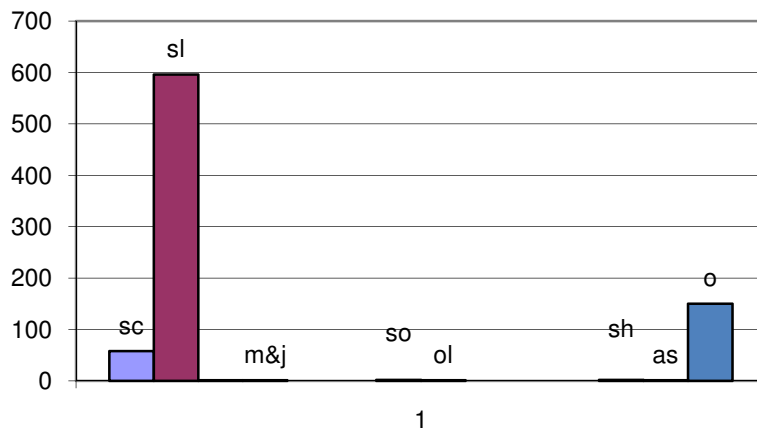
Looking at the three graphs in Figure 2a, it can be seen that most people (73%) attend Mass in the Parish that they live in, with a small number regularly travelling from elsewhere. There are a small number of people attending each parish from outside the Pastoral Area, 12% at St Catherine's, 18% at St Lewis and just 4% at All Saints. Therefore we can conclude from this question that most people attending Mass within the Pastoral Area, live within its boundaries.

Figure 2a: Which parish do you live in?

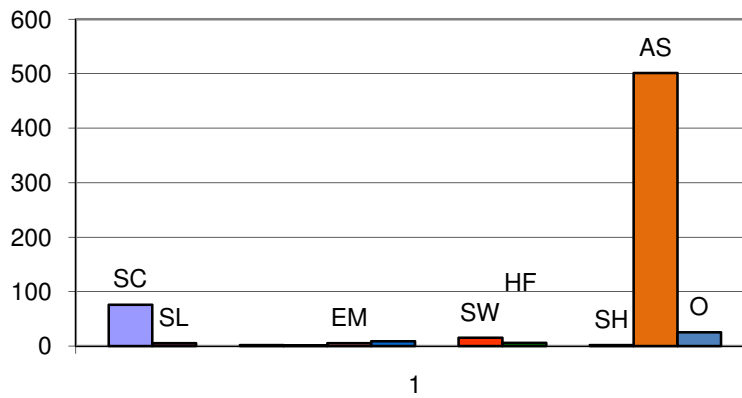
Q2 St Catherines



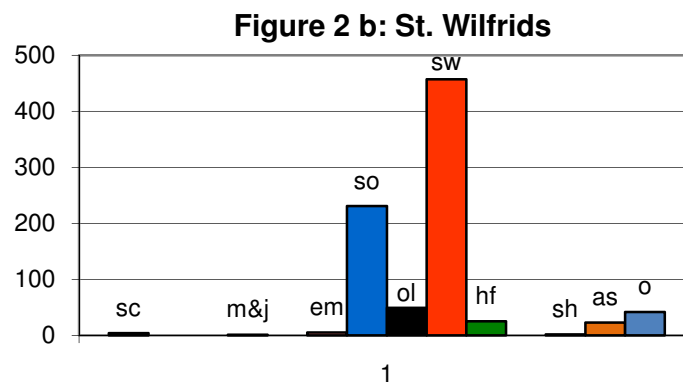
Q2 St Lewis



Q2 All Saints



There was one parish that did not follow this trend, St. Wilfrid's.



Just over half of parishioners (54%) attending St. Wilfrids parish live within its boundaries, but a significant number are coming from other parishes. In particular, 27% from St Oswald's regularly attend St Wilfrids and just 5% coming from outside the area. St Wilfrid's and St. Oswald's have a long history and have evolved over the years with very different characters which most likely accounts for these slightly unusual figures. However it may be an important consideration in future planning for both parishes. Every other parish follows the trends noted in first three graphs.

Question's 3 and 4 Gender and age

Basic demographic questions such as gender and age can give us information about the make -up of our congregations. It should be noted that there was a typing error on the survey sheet (See Appendix 1). The final category should have read 66+ not 60+ as it actually read. This may have had some effect on the data for the older end of the age scale. However, if the two oldest age categories are considered as a whole, the results are clear.

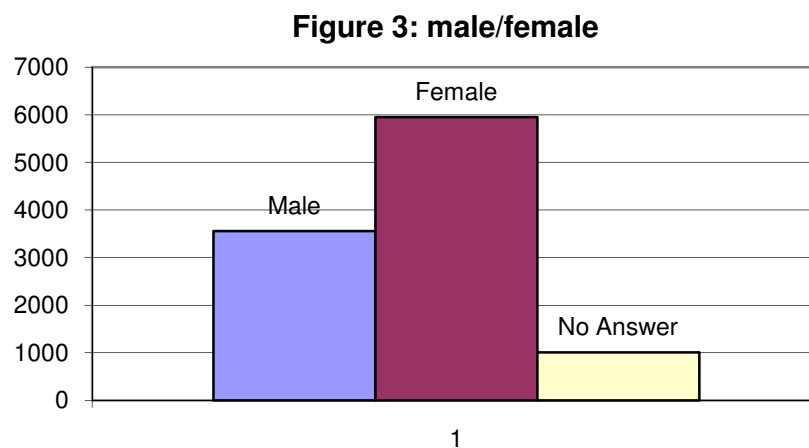
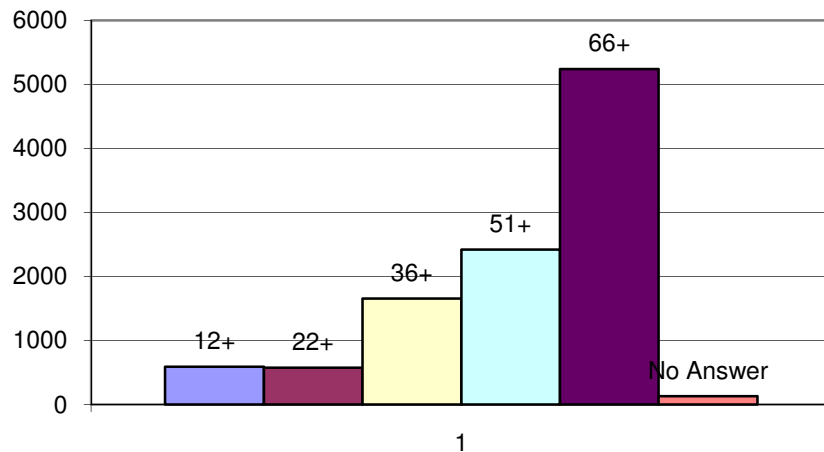


Figure 4: Q4 age



There are more women (63%) attending Mass than men (57%) and there are many more people over the age of fifty (74%) than there are under (26%).

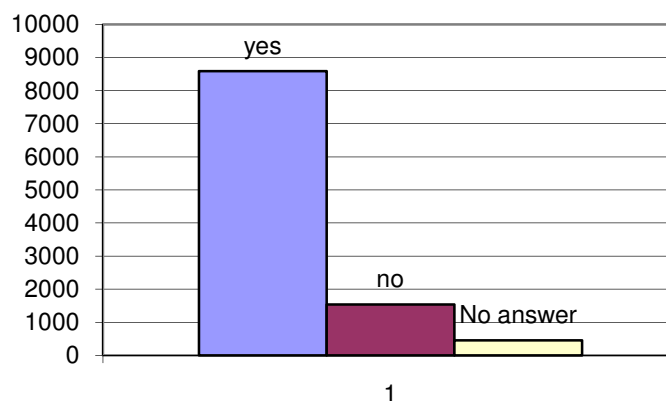
The age range of people attending Mass is worrying on many levels. In one sense society overall is ageing and the survey results reflect this. How are we going to manage this change? How are we going to support the elderly and enable them to get to Mass, with fewer younger people to bring them? Many parishes are run by the retired; with less clergy we must be careful not to over load people with more work than they can manage. We need to make changes in the way parishes are run so that important jobs can be done by people who can genuinely manage the challenges and are properly trained for their positions. Perhaps most crucially what will be the future of the church if we cannot find a way to reach out to younger generations and make church, community and faith relevant to their lives?

In addition to the problems posed by an ageing congregation, at this time of change it may be appropriate to address the issue of gender.

Question 5. Did you choose this Mass because the time was convenient?

As you are no doubt aware our Pastoral Area currently has 9 priests serving 13 parishes. All but two of these priests are over seventy and one is over ninety years of age. There are currently 25 Masses every weekend in the thirteen Parishes, 15 on Sunday Morning, 9 on Saturday evening and 1 on a Sunday evening. In the future, the Archdiocese has indicated that our clergy requirements are four, possibly five priests. This will of course depend on the numbers of available clergy and the numbers attending Mass within our PA. Therefore Mass times need to be organised so that four or five priests can say all the Masses on any given weekend across the Pastoral Area. Both the actual figures (presented below) and the comments people have made (See Q15) suggest that time is the single most significant factor in why people choose to attend a particular Mass.

Figure 5: Convenience of time



In all 8,586 responses indicated that the Mass was chosen because it was at a convenient time that is 81% of answers. The shuffling round of Mass times is a sensitive issue. Congregations tend to be very emotionally attached to 'their' Mass, most have arranged their Sundays around the time of Mass and to have it changed can be a big upheaval and inconvenience. Mass times will not be changed lightly, especially in view of the results of this survey, however the health of the clergy and the low numbers being ordained mean that some changes will have to be made in the near future. There are many factors which must be taken into consideration; work patterns can seriously affect Mass attendance, particularly those who work shifts; changes in Masses can have a significant impact on the revenue of a parish; the number of people it is possible to fit into the church; the age of the congregation and the possible difficulties in transport will all need to be considered to make the best possible reasoned decision. We will ALL need to be flexible, not every church can have Mass at 10 am on a Sunday morning.

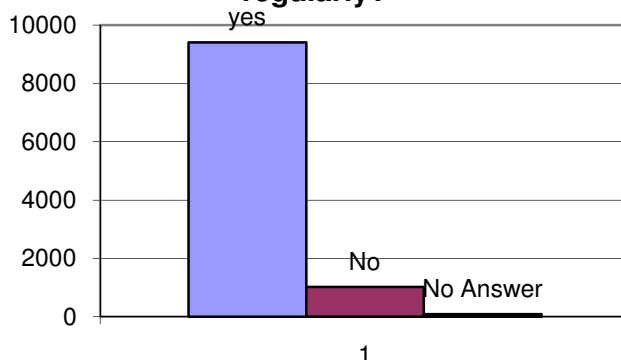
Question 5 Comments

As can be seen from the results in the previous section, most people answered 'yes', that they chose the Mass because the time was convenient. There was therefore not enough data from the rest of the questions which asked people to state what other reason they had chosen this Mass (see Appendix 1). There were one or two comments concerning attendance at special services e.g. on week three there was a special service at Holy Family to commission new Eucharistic ministers. Otherwise the comments reflected those made in Q15. Therefore the data was collapsed across the questions and those results are presented together in the Question 15 section.

Question 6 Do you attend this Mass on a regular basis?

When designing the survey we assumed that parishioners were attending the same Mass week in and week out: this question was designed to address that assumption.

Figure 6: Do you attend this Mass regularly?



As expected, most parishioners attend the same Mass each week (89%) with about 10% of the population moving between parishes for a variety of reasons (see question 9 results). This result reinforces the need for excellent communication with parishioners when changes to Mass times become inevitable.

Question 7 In the last five years which parish have you regularly attended?

This question was included to provide a direct comparison to question 2, which parish you actually live in. The question was designed to pinpoint which parish was regarded as 'my parish' so that we could compare to this with the parish people said they lived in. The percentage data in the table below suggests that most parishioners are regularly attending the parish that they live in. For example in St. Catherine's, 82% regularly attend the same Mass and 76% of people attending Mass there live within the parish boundaries. This trend is repeated over all 13 parishes with the exception of St Wilfrid's where there seem to be many people regularly attending Mass there that live outside the Parish boundaries. These results were supported by the answers for Question 2.

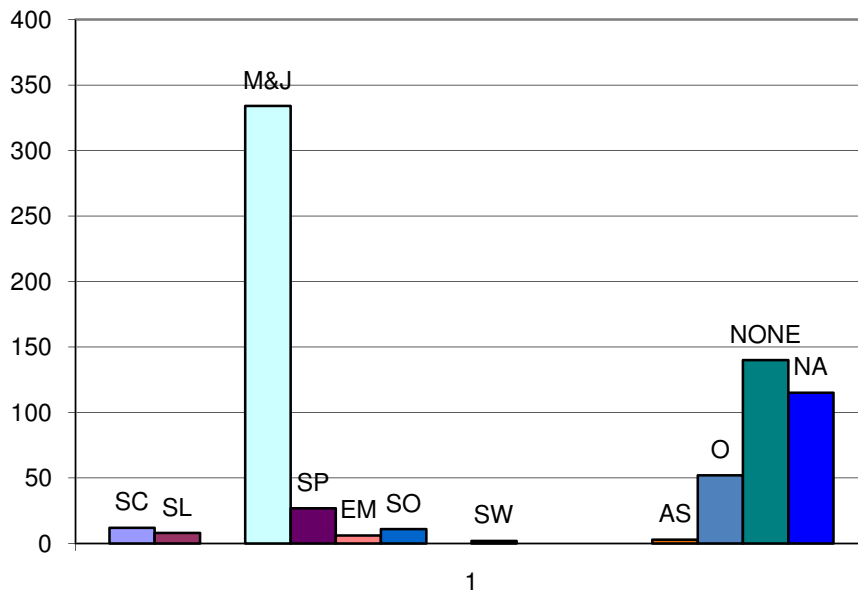
Table 1: Percentages for Q2 and Q7

Parish	% regularly attending the same Mass Q7	%regularly attending the parish they live in Q2
Saint Catherine	82	76
Saint Lewis	83	73
Saint David	78	66
SS. Mary & John	79	68
Saint Patrick	91	88
English martyrs	80	87
Saint Oswalds	80	80
Our Ladys	78	81
Saint Wilfrid	78	54
Holy Family	68	68
Saint Benedict	86	90
Sacred heart	79	71
All Saints	78	77

Question 8 What other parishes in the local area have you attended in the last five years?

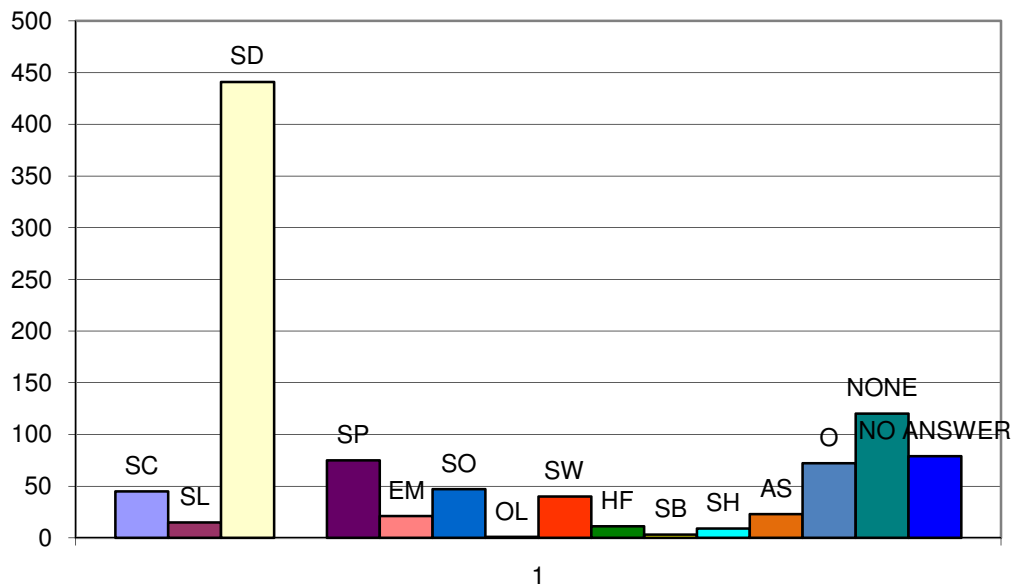
We included this question to give us some idea of the movement of people between parishes. In other words when your Mass is cancelled or inconvenient on a particular Sunday, where do you go? Do parishioners stay mainly within the parishes of our pastoral area or do they go elsewhere? As with question 2, the results from three parishes are presented to illustrate the trends seen in the whole of the data. For full details see the Pastoral area website.

Figure 7: Q8 St. Davids



Looking at Figure 7 when parishioners from St. David's parish visit a different parish for weekend Mass, they most often go to St. Mary and St. John's (47%).

Figure 8: Q8 St. Mary and St. John



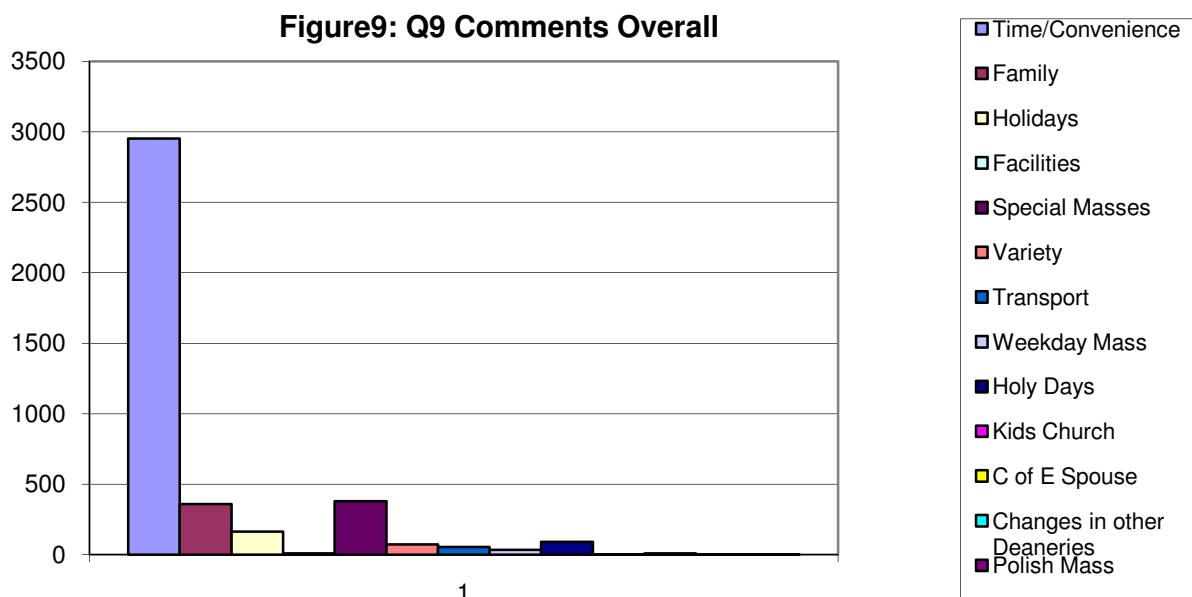
Looking at the data for St. Mary and St. John above, most parishioners (62%) from this parish visit St David’s when they need to attend Mass at a different time.

There are many likely reasons for these trends. The two parishes already share a priest so Mass times are already coordinated and there are likely to be a lot of shared services anyway. The two parishes are very close to one another geographically and so the next nearest church is the most obvious place to go. Each parish will have its own set of reasons for the trends displayed in the data.

Part of the plan we would like to propose for the development of our Pastoral Area, includes the clustering of parishes. The idea is that two or three parishes, which will remain independent and be run by laity, will be served by one priest. Finding out where people go to Mass when they can’t get to the one they usually attend, has provided valuable insight into the kinds of relationships that already exist between parishes. In the example given above St. Mary and St. John’s parish is proposed as a cluster with St. David’s and St. Patricks. The data confirm that these parishes already have some close ties. This trend is repeated throughout the thirteen parishes.

Question 9 Reasons.

We were also interested in the reasons why people visit other parishes. Is it just for a more convenient time to fit in with family and work commitments? Or are there other reasons why people may choose a parish other than their own on a particular weekend?

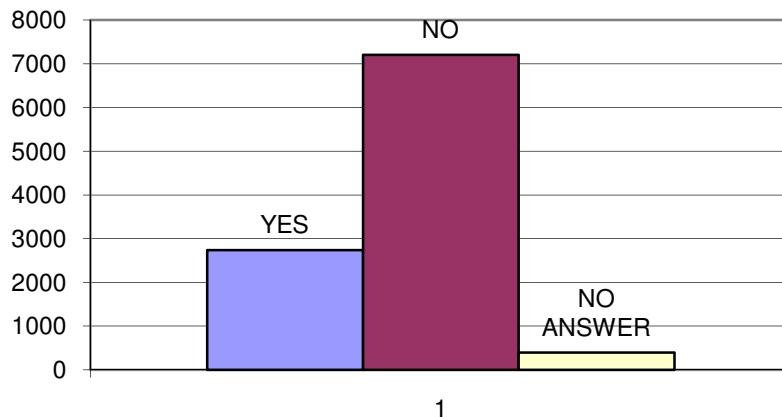


The data confirm what we suspected, that most people (71%) visit a parish other than their own because the time is more convenient that weekend. Other reasons include, special Masses, family commitments, Mass on holy days and some people travel for variety - to hear a different interpretation of the readings for that Sunday. There are many variations according to parish so for information on your own parish please see your individual parish report available from your parish representative, your parish website and the Pastoral Area website.

Question 10 Weekday Mass attendance.

This question was included to give us an idea of the numbers attending weekday Mass in the Pastoral area. These numbers will become more important in the future when the reduction in clergy has already taken place.

Figure 10: Weekday Mass Attendance

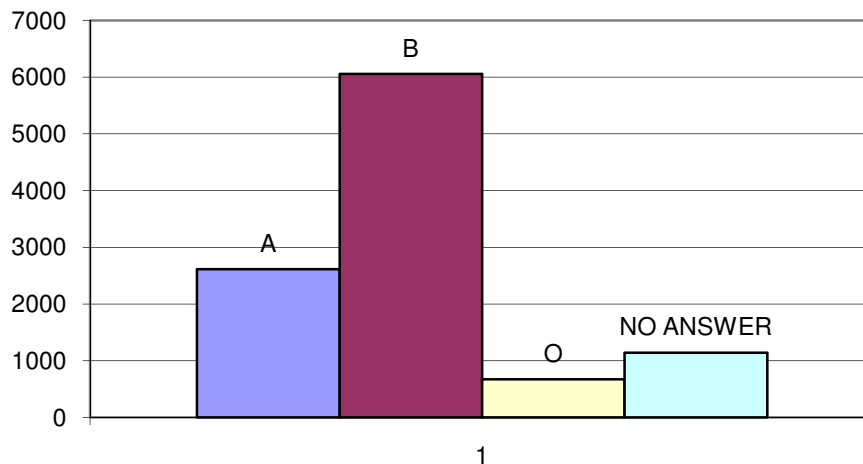


As expected most people (70%) do not attend daily Mass. These figures will receive further consideration in the future when saying Mass every day in every church in the pastoral area becomes impossible. There are however some variations between parishes which will need to be considered when the time comes.

Question 11 What would you do if this Mass was cancelled?

By including this question we were not trying to suggest that ANY Masses would be cancelled in the near future. However, we wanted to have some data to hand so that a quick decision about Mass times could be made should a priest retire or die suddenly.

Figure 11: Q11 If Mass was cancelled



(A= Would move parishes and stay with the same Mass time, B= Would stay in same parish and move round the time, O = other)

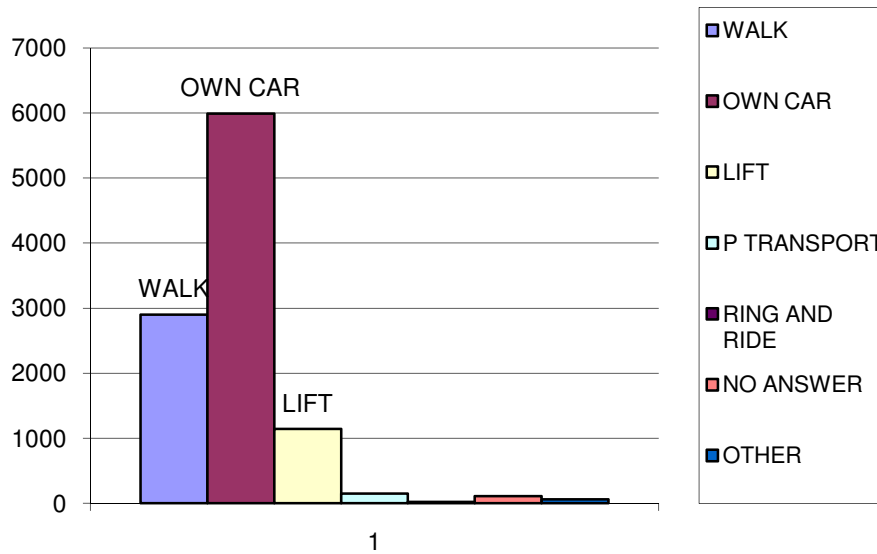
According to the results, most people (58%) would stay with their own parish and move Mass times (B) if their regular Mass was moved or cancelled. There are many people for whom this would not be possible, in particular shift workers and people who struggle to get to Mass on their own. However 58% is not an overwhelming majority and we may find that, parishioners will swap parishes and attend the most convenient Mass for them, as was the case in the Leigh Pastoral Area. St. Patricks was an exception to this in that 71% of parishioners stated that they would stay at St. Patricks and change Mass times, rather than go to another church

It will be essential for all of us to be flexible and realistic when this issue of changing Mass times is decided. Given our current and future clergy situation, we absolutely cannot carry on as we are. The Holy sacrifice of the Mass could easily become a 'conveyor belt service' that a reduced number of clergy rattle out several times a day. The end result of this would be exhausted, stressed clergy, ineffective pastoral care and teaching and even further reduction in our congregations.

Question 12 How did you get here?

An important issue in the shuffling of Mass times is transport. The results of Question 4 show we are a rapidly ageing congregation meaning that many people will need transport to Mass. People who are unable to drive or do not have a car will need to be considered, and provision put in place to compensate for any change in Mass venue. Also there is an issue of adequate parking facilities and disabled access.

Figure 12: How do you get to church?



At present 58% of people come to Mass in their own car and 30% walk. However this figure varies dramatically between parishes. These figures are presented below.

Table 3 Percentage transport to church

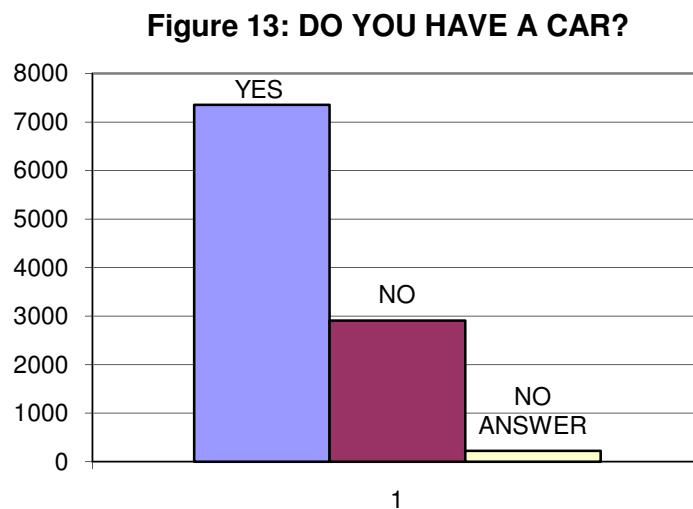
Parish	% walk	% Car	% lift	% other
St. Catherine	16	70	10	3
St Lewis	5	80	13	1
St. David	37	56	7	2
St. Mary and St. John	36	57	6	1
St. Patrick	49	38	12	Na
English Martyrs	41	42	14	2
St. Oswalds	31	56	10	3
Our Ladys	24	59	14	3
St. Wilfrids	20	66	11	3
Holy Family	29	52	15	3
St. Benedicts	43	41	8	8
Sacred heart	21	64	13	2
All Saints	27	56	9	8

Looking at the table above different trends exist in different parishes. Very few people in St Lewis walk to church (5%), most arrive by car probably because it is a difficult church to get to without a car. Car use is also very high at St. Catherines. St Patricks on the other hand has a higher percentage of parishioners walking to church (49%) that coming by car (38%) and St Benedict’s has an almost equal number of

people walking as coming by car. Each parish and cluster will need to consider the particular location of the church, the time of mass in relation to public transport and the facilities available at a particular church before making decisions about the future.

Question 13 Do you own a car?

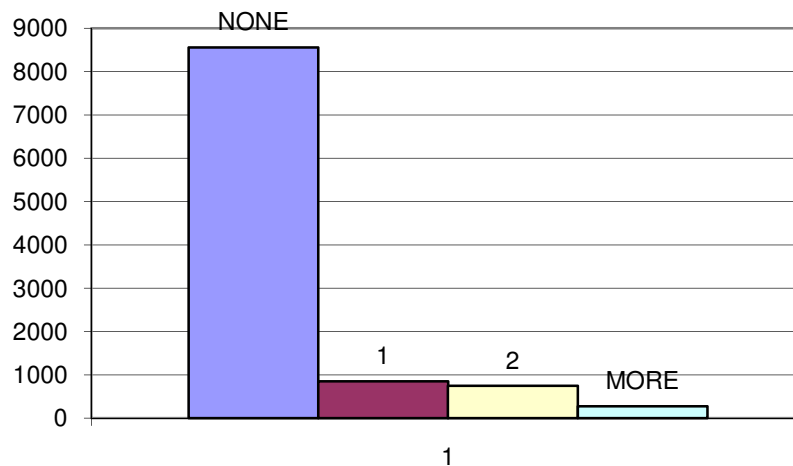
This question was included to give an indication of the resources we have to draw on in the future to allow people without a car of their own to get to Mass.



The issue of transport to Mass will become increasingly important in the near future. It may be we need someone in place in each parish who is responsible for making sure the elderly and infirm can get to church if they have no car. We need to collect data about how many people each church can hold, how many car parking spaces are available in each church and who is able/prepared to offer lifts to those without transport.

Question 14 Indicate how many children you have brought to Mass?

Figure 14: Number of children brought to Mass.



The data is consistent with the demographics demonstrated in question 4. Very few people (18%) are bringing children to Mass.

Question 15 Why do you come to this Mass?

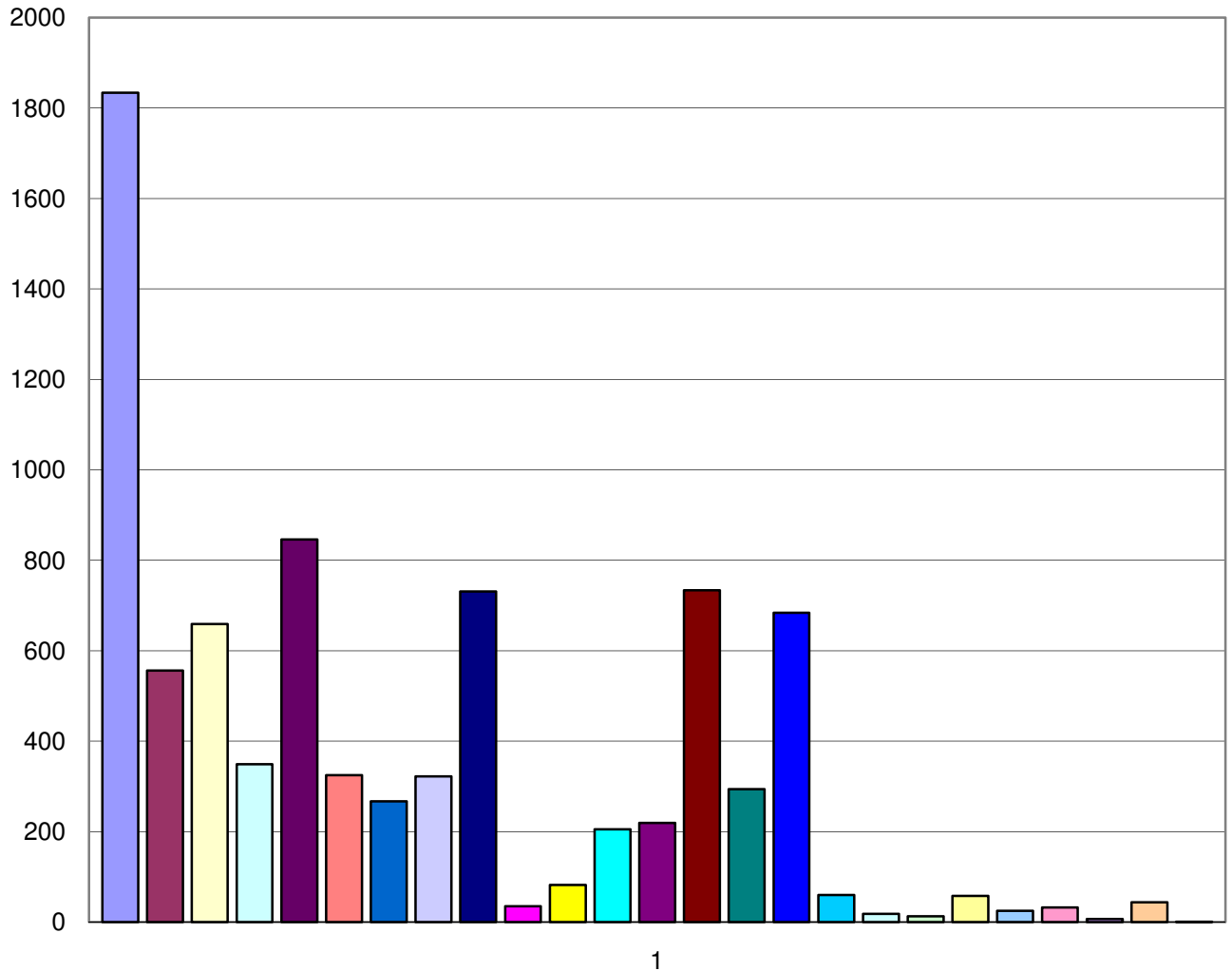
This has turned out to be one of the most interesting questions of all. Why people attend Mass where they do. As you can see from the graph on the next page, the reasons are many and varied and there are some significant variations according to parish.

Despite the fact that the question was very open ended, surprisingly, people still cited time and convenience as the most important factor in the Mass they choose. Secondly an idea of 'my parish' - a sense of loyalty and connectedness to a particular parish and Mass. Also important was a sense of community, loyalty to a parish priest and the music at the particular Mass attended.

However it is important to note that the results from some parishes for this question have an undue impact on the data. For example, in St Catherine's and SS. Mary and John, attended because of the parish priest. No other parish even came close to this and it dramatically skews the overall results. As a second example, only the parishioners of St. Wilfrids mentioned inclusivity as a reason for attending that Mass in that parish. In St. Patricks on the other hand Liturgy is stated as the reason for attendance. Results for individual parishes are more accurate and reveal some

interesting characteristics. Also please note that there is no data available for Saint Benedict's or St. David's parishes at the present time.

Figure 15: Over all why did you choose this Mass

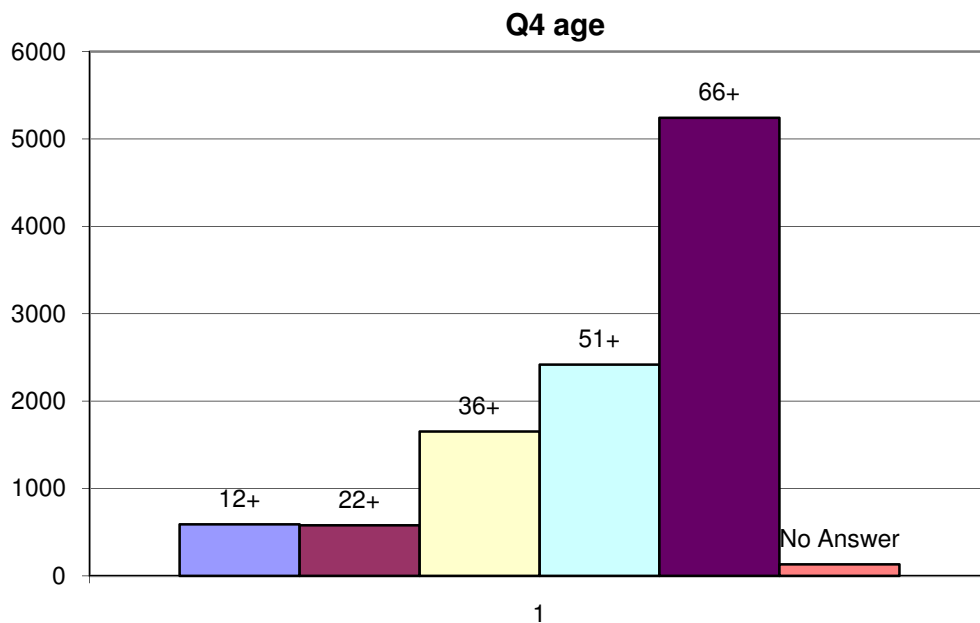


- | | | | |
|------------------|----------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Time/Convenience | Liturgy | Welcome/Friendly | Local |
| My Parish | Everything | Commitments at Mass | God/Duty |
| Community/Family | Transport | Short/Quiet Mass | Homily |
| Atmosphere | Priest/Deacons | Kids Church | Music |
| Building | Accessibility | Parents bring me | Only Sunday Mass |
| Special Mass | School | Parade Sunday | Inclusive |
| weekday Mass | | | |

A Portrait of a Parish

One way of looking at the data in an easily understandable way is to suggest what a 'typical parish' within our pastoral area might look like. By taking averages of all the data, we can get a picture of how our parishes are looking overall and provide a comparison for our own parish data so we can easily see success and struggle and where improvements could be made.

Each Mass in our 'average parish' is attended by 106 people. Of these 36 will be men and 60 women (the rest chose not to answer). The age profile of the 'average parish' is shown in figure 16 below. 72% of people are over the age of 51 and only 5% below the age of 21.



86 out of the 106 people attending (81%) do not bring any children with them. And 61 will come in their own car. The majority of the 106 people in our 'average parish' (95) attend the same Mass every week, choosing this Mass because the time is convenient (87/106). This number is confirmed by the comments on survey sheets as to the main reason why they choose one Mass over another

When parishioners do choose to attend a different parish in the PA, time is the overriding factor in their choice of Mass.

In conclusion

The undertaking of the parish survey was the first step in a long process of assessing and auditing the resources we have available to us in our area. It has

provided us with valuable data on which we, the Pastoral Area Working Group can base some immediate decisions that need to be made, especially in relation to Mass times. The data will also be very useful for individual parishes in their immediate and medium term planning.

It was a huge task and we can only apologise for the delay in getting the results to you. Our excuses and reasons are many and we will not bore you with them here but it simply would not have been possible in the circumstances we found ourselves, to get this information out any quicker. As it is, there is much more information that could be gained by further study of the data we have, and by comparing with future data in say five years time.

The results of the survey have revealed some interesting facts about our parishes. We are very loyal to our parish, sometimes through family or historical ties, sometimes for locality or convenience and sometimes because of the particular type of liturgy. In the main we like our clergy, and our communities hold an important place in our lives. However, we are an ageing community (reflecting society in general) and there are few young people coming through to take on some of the important organisational roles within our parish communities. As a church we need to recognise that society has changed. We are largely working on an old model that is no longer relevant. We need to reorganise to take account of increasing work commitments and a reluctance to take on a responsible roles that do not offer any remuneration.

We also have more women than men coming to church, while this may always have been the case, it does not mean we need to stay like this. At a time of such change it may be a good opportunity to address this issue. Some parishes do not follow this trend. What are they doing differently and could the rest of us learn from them?

In the main we attend Mass at the same time each week and have, to some extent, arranged our lives around going to a particular service. On the odd occasion when we cannot make our regular Mass we chose an alternative based on time and convenience, often the church that is closest to us. Most of us are getting to Mass in our cars.

Crucially for our survey, most people stated that if the time of their regular Mass changed, they would prefer to stay within their parish and adjust the time that they attended Mass, rather than move to another parish at the same time. This result reflects the results of the survey in the neighbouring Pastoral Area of Leigh. However, the result was not overwhelming and showed some differences between Saturday Mass goers and Sunday. Results in the Leigh Pastoral Area showed the same trend but when times were actually moved around, parishioners simply moved parishes to stick with the convenient time, despite what they had stated in the survey. Of course there are many people for whom a change in Mass times would be potentially disastrous, people who work shifts or have mobility problems are likely to

be particularly affected and the issue of transport and access to Mass is an important one.

There are also important issues for individual Parishes and particular characteristics that we may not wish to change. For example, Sacred Heart, St. Wilfrid's, St. Lewis, and St. Catherine's seem to have a slightly higher than average number of young people. Important differences, like these could be useful in the future as we build a new church in our area. If one church is struggling with any aspect of parish life we can get some help from a neighbouring parish that does not struggle with the same issue. In this way we can begin to work together, to build one another up and in the process build a strong church in our Pastoral Area.