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Parish Ministry: Servant of Mission

What is the Understanding of 'Ministry' in today's Church with particular Focus on 5 Parishes in South London?

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King's College London

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DThMin Thesis

Parish Ministry: Servant of Mission

What is the Understanding of 'Ministry'

in today's Church

with particular Focus on 5 Parishes

in South London?

A thesis presented for the degree of

Doctorate in Theology and Ministry (DThMin)

Department of Education and Professional Studies

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of ministry in the multi-ethnic world of South London. In this setting, language, tradition, custom and culture have become both obstacle and key to ecclesiological understanding and community engagement.

At the outset, a theological framework for the study is established. This encompasses church, parish, charism and ministry, all serving the primary task of mission. From an empirical study involving some of the key people who give their time and talent to their local communities in five South London parishes, ministry is seen not as an isolated activity but as something that is a dynamic and significant component within the greater pastoral context.

This study highlights the importance of mapping a local theology by listening attentively to the local culture, and engaging with community members as they reflect on life in their context. The research also brings to light the tensions and conflicts that surface internally when the exercise of power by the institutional Church is experienced at parish level. A gulf can be observed between the institution and the people of God in the local faith community.

At the heart of this study there emerges an acute awareness of the near-absence of critical theological reflection on parish practice. The empirical evidence also suggests that there is a matrix of issues which are in need of immediate and sustained attention. These include communication, dialogue and formation. It is clear that strategic pastoral planning is required so that the needs of the people can be continually identified, the Sunday Liturgy be meaningfully sustained, catechists be regularly recruited and adequately trained and the young Church be appropriately welcomed and nourished.

A review of ministerial formation for both lay and ordained people emerges as fundamentally important in the long-term interests of communion, co-responsibility and accountability for mission.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Why this Study?

I come to this study from over 30 years of pastoral and practical experience as parish priest in a variety of South London, Roman Catholic, multi-cultural parishes; experience and research therefore merge as complementary mentors to the project. The level of commitment and dedication of so many people who give their lives to their parish communities is deeply impressive. It has to be acknowledged that 99% of the parish workforce are voluntary people, driven by the values found in the Gospel and with the good of the parish at heart.

This study matters because it looks at the reasons behind their motivation and seeks to understand this highly significant level of faith, service and leadership, often taken for granted, but pastorally indispensable. This study seeks to comprehend what attracts people to parish ministry and it invites them to articulate the reasons for their loyalty and enduring allegiance. The parish is dependent on such commitment as it seeks to come to terms with the decline in ordained ministry as well the constant exodus by those to whom the Church is no longer relevant.

A more immediate reason for this study is the invitation and the challenge articulated by John Paul II when he called for a New Evangelisation ¹ to discover 'new ways' to proclaim the Gospel in today's world. The 21st century presents a formidable challenge to today's Church in the form of secularism, globalisation and a constantly changing new world of digital communication. Virtual communities now ensure that relationships are maintained electronically and that people belong to various places simultaneously and with clinical anonymity. Ros Stuart-Buttle asks 'who is my neighbour in cyber-space?'². Parishes may fall well behind the digital frontier but they still provide a very real presence to those in search of the sacred.

¹ John Paul II, 'I sense that the moment has come to commit all the church's energies to a new evangelisation and to the mission *ad gentes*. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples'. *Redemptoris Missio*, #3. Rome, 1990.

² Sullivan, J., (editor) *Communicating Faith*, Catholic University of America, 2011, from a chapter by Ros Stuart-Buttle entitled, 'On-Line Learning', p.333.

Parishes, however, can grow stale and tired and are always in need of renewal. In the absence of any kind of systematic theological reflection or critique of practice, rite, ritual and routine can easily dominate proceedings. The reduced numbers of clergy, the amalgamation and clustering of parishes, the multiplicity of cultures, can all serve to sharpen the perception of the parish as an irrelevant and obsolete institution.

Young people in particular are drawn to, and obsessed by, the world of technology. The traditional parish routine no longer seems to connect to, or keep pace with, the trajectory of their lives. The older generation lament what they perceive as a haemorrhaging Church. Catechesis and apparent commitment seem to be confined to moments of Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation and school entry. Many people no longer look to the Church for guidance and there seem to be three categories of Catholics emerging in today's world: the committed, the casual and the disengaged. The backbone of an active, engaged and committed Catholicism would seem to be an ageing group.

Yet, in my own experience of over three decades of pastoral work in South London, a substantial number of people seem to give their whole lives to their parish communities. Their commitment may be based on devotional loyalty, traditional allegiance or ministerial involvement, but the parish is their sacred space. They live and work and serve the place they call home and they dedicate their lives where they know they belong. The parish is the place where they experience Church and encounter the person of Christ. In all this synergy, however, there is an implicit theology embedded which is worth exploring.

In this project, I ask some key people working in parish communities for their views, perceptions, insight and wisdom. Such empirical data has genuine and authentic currency because it comes from lived pastoral experience, steeped in faith, history, scripture and tradition. In order to secure a response with genuine insight and credibility, I have deliberately chosen to explore the views of an experienced and committed cross section of people who have an established track record of pastoral experience.

A further reason for the study is to look at the life of the local Church after all the tensions from the recent crisis of power abuse in the Roman Catholic Church.

The Church's image and credibility have been severely tarnished by the clear ethical breach by some clergy of their fiduciary responsibility ³. It will be interesting to see if there are lessons to be learned at local level about how people are called to ministry and what kind of formation is best suited for those entrusted with pastoral leadership.

During the course of this project Pope Francis issued his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* which gave additional validity, purpose and motivation to my research project; 'I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelisation in their respective communities'⁴. Such an invitation for direct dialogical pastoral engagement in the local Church has not really been heard since *Gaudium et Spes* in 1965. The challenge issued by Francis presents a valuable opportunity to engage with the local reality and begin to see its ecclesial potential in a different way.

This study is an opportunity to explore the fact that the parish community is infinitely more than what we initially encounter or perceive. There is a vast network of life and energy at work behind the scenes. There is a great spiritual wisdom at the heart of every community which is worth exploring because it is centred on the Eucharist, the source and summit of the Christian life. This study explores how parish ministry leads to a personal encounter with Jesus. It also demonstrates the way in which the activities of a parish provide a great deal of 'public benefit' to the local community, something that all dioceses, as charities, are now obliged to demonstrate and report.

Reading the signs of the times, the age profile of the assembled presbyterate at the annual Chrism Mass may be an indicator that perhaps the Spirit is leading the Church in another direction. In view of the significant reduction of ordained personnel, there is an urgent pastoral need to identify the gifts and charisms of lay people and invite them to participate to their full potential in parish life.

³ Gula, R., *Ethics in Ministry*, Paulist Press, New York, 1996, p.74. 'Everything we do to serve the religious needs of people flows through the pastoral relationship. Its covenantal action of entrusting and accepting entrustment makes fidelity to trust the fundamental moral imperative for the pastoral minister. In professional ethics, this imperative is called the professional's fiduciary responsibility'. See also *Breach of Trust, Sexual Exploitation by Health Care Professionals and Clergy*, edited by John C Gonsiorek, Sage Publications, London, 1995. pp 238 – 242.

⁴ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #33.

According to Pope Francis, these gifts and charisms 'are not an inheritance, safely secured and entrusted to a small group for safekeeping; rather they are gifts of the Spirit integrated into the Body of the Church, drawn to the centre which is Christ and then channelled into an evangelising impulse'⁵. If we are to realistically engage with the challenge of the new evangelisation, the people in the local parish community will be its driving force.

Parishes in South London attract substantial numbers of people from a wide variety of backgrounds. The potential for direct invitation, formation and engagement in the life of the local Church is extremely high. The opportunity to engage more people with pastoral responsibility is to honour their baptismal calling as outlined in the Second Vatican Council. From my experience, the South London parish is the site of an exciting local theology, where the multi-cultural context invites and shapes a rich reflection at the interface of faith and life.

1.2 Aims and Objectives of the study

Aims

This research question has an ecclesiological basis with implications for both practical theology and pastoral ministry. The first aim of this project is to understand the life of the local Church with a view to enriching its quality of practice. At the present time, not least because of the decline in numbers pursuing a vocation to the ordained ministry, the role of lay people has come into sharp focus, as some parishes may well evolve to lay leadership with external ministers assigned to their spiritual care.⁶ A genuine insight into the life of the local Church can be gleaned only by asking some penetrating questions of those who actually live and work there.

The second aim of this project is to facilitate an encounter between theological reflection and faith practice. There is much to be gained by a cross-fertilisation

⁵ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #130

⁶ *The Code of Canon Law*, Collins, London 1983, Canonical provision for this arrangement is secured in Canon 517#2: 'if because of a lack of priests, the Diocesan Bishop has decided that participation in the exercise of the pastoral care of the parish is to be entrusted to a Deacon, to another person who is not a priest, or to a community of persons, he is to appoint some priest who, provided with the powers and faculties of a pastor, is to direct the pastoral care'.

of experience and theory. Swinton and Mowat observe that parish pastoral practices require critical reflection because 'these situations are complex, they need to be examined in dialogue with scripture and tradition'⁷. Some parishes are preoccupied with planning and delivering annual sacramental programmes but devote limited time to reflecting on best practice or to make an effective evaluation of completed projects. An invitation to those involved in parish ministry to reflect on their work in the life of the parish would help to sharpen their perception of ministry, understand the reason for their involvement and facilitate the inclusion of more people in the life of the local community.

Objectives

In order to achieve the first aim of understanding the life of the local Church, the first objective of this study is to explore the various theological elements that comprise the local Church and have an immediate impact on its life. The vital issues of Church, parish, gifts, charisms and ministry all form a theological framework and have a significant role to play in how the local parish community fulfils and honours its mission. It is very likely that regular parishioners do not fully comprehend these various elements at work around them. They are drawn to the parish for a variety of reasons but may never have been invited to reflect on their ministry and how that ministry relates to the *Missio Dei*. Many people in parish communities may be happy to serve anonymously but the opportunity to reflect theologically and critique their ministry could lead to a greater understanding of collaboration, communion and co-responsibility for Mission.

To accomplish the first objective I will show how the dynamic interaction of Church, parish, charism and ministry, as well as scripture and tradition combine as author of a local theology. By raising awareness of ministry and pastoral practice, the study will contribute to the faith development of those involved in various aspects of ministry. Parishes are busy places. Pastoral practice rests in the hands of practitioners with 'little time or energy for theorising or critical reappraisal'⁸. Consequently, these practices need to be 'interpreted, assessed, evaluated and theologically understood in their concreteness'⁹. Given the

⁷ Swinton, J., Mowat, H., *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, SCM Press, London 2006. pp.15.16

⁸ Sweeney, J., et al, *Keeping Faith in Practice*, SCM Press, 2010, p.26

⁹ Sweeney, J., p.22.

dynamic nature of the parish as a community of people engaged in a range of communal activities, the opportunity for such reflection and appraisal is essential to its forward planning and strategic development.

For the second objective I will carry out an empirical exploration of five Roman Catholic parishes in order to measure their understanding of ministry and see how their ministry contributes to the overall Mission of the Church. Choosing five parishes provides a reasonably broad base for exploration, evaluation and feedback. The fact that they are geographically situated in multicultural South London gives added value as it places the Church in the middle of a very multi-ethnic environment. The authors of *On the Way to Life* take the view that 'the church's engagement with contemporary cultures is not optional. It is the dialogue of life'.¹⁰ This empirical section is a vital element in the process as it provides a live feed of information, perception and current thinking. If the empirical dimension is not achieved, the answer to this research question remains pure theory and speculation. Parishes can easily slide into routine operational mode. The absence of any kind of theological reflection simply consolidates routine as the norm.

The empirical exercise will also provide the opportunity for people directly involved in parish life to articulate their hopes and aspirations as well as their concerns about the pastoral life in which they are engaged. The purpose of this objective is to identify those elements in parish life that work well. The empirical investigation also creates the opportunity for experienced practitioners to indicate any defective policies or procedures that inhibit ministry or that may constitute some form of resistance to pastoral development.

The study will engage with and honour the many 'little theologies'¹¹ already at work within various parishes in order to empower the people involved with them. Clemens Sedmak maintains that little theologies are based on the optimism that 'a local context is full of the potential to grow and be transformed'¹². A practical objective is to facilitate a "waking up",¹³ and to offer participants the opportunity

¹⁰ *On the Way to Life*, The Catholic Education Service, The Heythrop Institute for Religion, Ethics and Public Life, 2005, p.68.

¹¹ Sedmak, C., *Doing Local Theology*, Orbis Books, New York, 2002, pp 119-141. Little theologies are developed face to face with people without using 'canned' answers. (p.130)

¹² Ibid p.126.

¹³ Ibid p.5

to reflect critically on the way we are now, while allowing the possibility of a vision to form, of what we might become.

The third objective is to extrapolate and identify the main findings from the empirical exercise. This is a vital element as it names the issues that either inspire or hinder the development of the local Church. Awareness of these issues is of fundamental importance to future planning or any kind of strategic pastoral development .

1.3 The Context of the Project

The project will offer some constructive comments and suggestions about ways in which the local Church may develop greater harmony between what Gerard Mannion describes as its 'self understanding, its ecclesiological vision, and the day to day reality of life in the local church (ecclesial practice)' Mannion interprets ecclesiology as the science of 'envisioning the church in a variety of ways'¹⁴. It is a fact that most parishes are busy places, constantly delivering a variety of services to people in search of the sacred. But there is also a certain inherited preoccupation in parishes with preserving their own ecclesiastical patch. This may well be derived from the fact that a parish is defined in Canon Law as 'territorial'¹⁵ and the 'boundary element' is inherited, guarded and passed down through the generations. The result is a jigsaw of resourceful ecclesial pockets of pastoral activity but with little or no connection to their neighbouring parish communities or awareness of the potential resourcefulness of the wider Mission landscape.

There is no doubt that a Deanery¹⁶ has the combined resources to do more in terms of formation, for example, than an individual parish which may struggle to produce the personnel, facilities or finance required. However, the local process of communication, collaboration, cooperation and partnership among parishes is challenging when faced with an historical system of parochial independence

¹⁴ Mannion, G., *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity, Questions for the Church of our Time*, Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 2007, preface p.xiii.

¹⁵ Code of Canon Law, Collins, 1983, c.518. But see also the emphasis placed on the community aspect of the parish in c515 explored in section 1.2.

¹⁶ A Deanery is a pastoral area comprising of a number of local parishes with a Dean appointed by the Archbishop in accordance with C. 553.

and individuality. Nevertheless, the resources and goodwill are there to be explored. The charisms¹⁷ and gifts are also present at various stages of engagement. An integral purpose to this study is to invite people to see what might be possible. To research this kind of encounter, according to James Sweeney, is to 'engage in the exposition of the living *sensus fidelium*'¹⁸ (sense of the faithful).

An understanding of why things are done gives a deeper significance to how they are done. Michael Downey endorses this view when he quotes from a Pastoral Letter of Roger Cardinal Mahony of Los Angeles on Ministry. Mahony articulates an understanding of ministry where *knowing* has priority over *doing*. Downey is convinced that the most important 'skill' for the minister is to *know*. Being schooled in theological reflection as well as scripture, tradition and local custom is 'required and not merely desirable'¹⁹. Downey sees the need for a wider, informed vision of parish life to be experienced and celebrated by all the faithful. This will come about only if those at the heart of parish ministry have received adequate formation which leads them to explore the broader outlook.

Given the long, well established traditions and customs of parish life, the task of pastoral reflection is a challenging one, especially in an environment where the prospect of change may meet some resistance. Traditions and customs are not just tried and tested ways of doing things but, as Lawrence Porter indicates, 'they represent the inherited experience of the community'²⁰. They carry the local story that for some people has become part of the treasured infrastructure of parish life. Emerging tensions between competing ecclesial practices and the polarisation and fragmentation they often generate at parish level, has to be acknowledged and addressed.

Insight into parish practice is sharper if it is facilitated from within the parish system but with external guidance. An internal analysis may be very insular, as 'we can overlook the things that outsiders might consider'²¹. However, in any business, according to Peter Senge, 'progress depends on the ability to

¹⁷ The term 'charism' comes from the Greek word *charisma*, often translated as 'gift' and has its sources in the Pauline literature of the New Testament

¹⁸ Sweeney, et al, *Keeping Faith in Practice*, p.283.

¹⁹ Wood, S., (editor) *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood*, Ministerial Identity by Michael Downey, SCM Press, Minnesota 2003, pp 3-24.

²⁰ Porter, L. B., *A Guide to the Church*, St Paul's, 2007, p.8

²¹ Schreiter, p.41

suspend existing ways of seeing in order to imagine new ways of working’²². The parish community, of course, is not just a business, it is a very particular way of life that contains all the hallmarks of human and divine interaction: ‘a diversity of ministry but a oneness of mission’²³.

1.4 The Scope of the Project

The thesis will focus on the level of awareness and understanding of ministry in the service of Mission among 5 parishes in South London. Collectively, the five parishes offer a broad variety of multicultural experience and life. Individually, they offer different models of leadership and interaction. Historically, they offer a rich and varied tradition of service. Theologically, they offer an extensive menu of ecclesiological perspectives. Sociologically, they offer living evidence in real time of demographic changes in population and the impact of globalisation. Peter Senge remarks that ‘globalisation is reshaping societies and cultures on a scale that has never happened before’²⁴.

The study will focus on adults who are involved in various ministries in their parish communities. The study does not include people under 18 but does include the views and insights of those involved in youth ministry so that the voice of the young Church may be heard and incorporated.

Richard Gaillardetz sees ministry in the local Church as ‘ecclesial re-positioning’²⁵ where a person assumes a new relationship with the Church as a particular kind of minister. Gaillardetz outlines the components of repositioning as: (1) a personal call, (2) ecclesial discernment and recognition of a genuine charism, (3) formation appropriate to the demands of the ministry, (4) ecclesial authorisation by community leadership, (5) some liturgical ritualisation of

²² Senge, P., et al, *Presence: Exploring Profound Change in People, Organisations and Society*, London, Nicholas Brearley Publishing, 2005, pp. 21-68.

²³ Flannery, A., (editor) *Vatican II*, Dominican Publications, Dublin 1996 edition, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, #2.

²⁴ Senge, P. *Presence*, p. 178. Peter Senge tends to focus on decentralising the role of leadership in organisations so as to enhance the capacity of all people to work productively towards common goals.

²⁵ Wood, S., (Editor) From an article by Richard Gaillardetz, *The Theological Foundations of Ministry within an Ordered Communion*, p.26 – 48.

assuming this ministry and (6) accountability²⁶. These components outlined by Gaillardetz are important because they provide a very useful framework for identifying, discerning and celebrating various ministries in the parish assembly. It will be informative to see whether parishes are aware of such a framework or whether it is a case that ministers are left to establish their own method of exercising their ministry.

The purpose of the empirical dimension of this research will be to identify ways in which current pastoral teaching and practice have enabled a selection of lay people in five parishes (a) to come to an understanding of their calling, (b) to respond by participating in ministry in their parishes and (c) to offer their particular insight into ways in which their gifts can be more effectively used in the service and mission of the local Church. Comparing Gaillardetz's theory with local grassroots research in South London should provide some interesting pastoral insights.

1.5 Design Methodology

This project uses quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the research question. Using questionnaires and interviews, I shall measure the level of awareness and understanding of ministry as experienced by key people in five parish communities. As the project is located in the local Church, it will be interesting to see how a variety of people, actively engaged in parish life, perceive their ministry (i.e. what those who minister actually do and what they think they should perhaps be doing) and also to ascertain the challenges or barriers that they face. The project has four distinct chapters:

Chapter 1:

This section establishes the reason for the study as well as its aims, objectives, context and scope. The design methodology is introduced as well as the challenge of mapping a local theology.

²⁶ Wood, p.260, as elaborated on in the National Pastoral Conference, Athlone, Ireland, September 2012.

Chapter 2:

This will be a theological exploration on the themes of ministry where ministry will be identified and recognised as part of a significantly wider network of pastoral life. Ministry is not an isolated department of Church life but something that is part of a greater pastoral framework which incorporates aspects of Church, parish, culture and charism, all serving the primary task of Mission. This section will demonstrate that collectively, all these ingredients are strategically underpinned by scripture, tradition and effective communication.

Perspectives will be gleaned from the writings of Thomas F O'Meara and David Heywood. These writers are important because of their experience, expertise and insights into ecclesiology and Mission. They underscore and highlight ministry as a particular dynamic of parish life. This section will also draw on insights from *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes*, and *Apostolicam Actuositatem* - key documents from the Second Vatican Council which root the mission of the Church in the missionary nature of the Trinity. The teaching of Vatican II will provide the immediate frame of reference for considering key questions on the Church. Vatican II is 'not a past event, but a continuing process in the church's life'²⁷. The purpose of this phase is to set the pastoral scene.

Chapter 3:

In order to determine the degree of understanding, involvement and participation at local parish level, a range of people from five different parishes in South London will be invited to participate in an anonymous questionnaire and some will be selected for interview.

I will send a questionnaire to 100 people from the five parishes (20 people per parish) who are already actively engaged in various aspects of parish pastoral ministry. It is not possible to say that they are typical of the majority but they will represent a sound cross section of local Church (Deanery) opinion. These people are currently listed on a Deanery database compiled last year. They all responded to an invitation to participate in adult faith formation at Deanery level. As committed practitioners, their insights will be genuinely evaluative as they will be speaking with knowledge gained from pastoral involvement and

²⁷ *On the Way to Life*, Catholic Education Service, the Heythrop Institute for Religion, Ethics and Public Life, 2005, p.49

experience. Information about their age, ethnicity and gender will be requested on the questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire will be to discern their understanding, involvement and participation in parish life and ministry.

Sample questions will include: How did they get involved in the life of the Church? What aspect of parish life do they serve? How are they encouraged to use their gifts? What resistance, obstacles or barriers are experienced? What is their greatest challenge at local pastoral level? How do they actually understand their ministry in the local Church? What are the big concerns as they look to the future for their parish and their Deanery?

In order to incorporate the views of those not actively involved in parish ministry, I will make further questionnaires available to people generally. They will be left at church pick-up points of the five participating parishes, with open invitations published in parish newsletters. The questionnaire will also be available on line in the local Deanery website, inviting responses. This will be a general sampling, adding another dimension to the gathered data, perhaps indicating the reasons for non-involvement in parish life. The questionnaire went through several drafts and pilot surveys were made. The result was a clarification, sharpening and simplicity of language which was necessary for accessibility in a multi-ethnic environment.

Ten selected key people (two per parish) will be interviewed for qualitative data. In addition, two ordained ministers will also be interviewed. I have chosen these twelve participants because of their particular leadership skills, their pastoral involvement and their experience of theology on the ground. All of them are involved in parish organisation and ministry as catechists, teachers, parents, members of Parish Pastoral Councils and youth ministry. The purpose of this exercise is to see how the gifts of the community could be more strategically identified, cultivated and engaged to develop communion and co-responsibility for the mission of the local Church.

The empirical gathering of evidence will be followed by an analysis of the data in order to draw out the findings and prioritise the obstacles to ministry that need to be addressed. Engaging both quantitative and qualitative methodologies is the best approach in order to achieve triangulation, forming a

balanced view and outcome from the question. These procedures are interlinked and inform each other.

The project could have been served by Action Research²⁸. However, that procedure seems too time-pressured, lacking the breadth of vision and capacity for rigour required by the chosen methods, which allow everyone quality time to reflect on and articulate their pastoral insights on the local Church.

Chapter 4:

This will be an interpretation of the data where the outcomes of Chapters 2 and 3 will be correlated. The aim of Chapter 4 will be specifically to identify and interpret the key findings of the study. At this stage I should also be able to recognise some of the more prevalent systemic obstacles which present significant challenge, as well as to point up ways of facilitating the development of co-responsibility of ordained and lay people for the life and Mission of the Church, as expressed within their parishes.

Priorities established through analysis and reflection on the findings of the overall study will form a pastoral base, providing a useful foundation for future development. The interpretation will be reflected against the backdrop of insights gleaned from contemporary Catholic ecclesiology described in Chapter 2.

1.6 Original and Distinctive

The work will be original in that it will bring into dialogue key themes in contemporary Catholic ecclesiology and the actual experience of a particular cohort of parishioners. Its distinctive contribution to pastoral theological discourse will lie, potentially, in the outcomes of the work as a piece of sound qualitative research.

²⁸ Swinton & Mowat, pp 254-260. With Action Research, the focus seems to be on problem solving rather than challenging the underlying reasons for a particular practice.

1.7 Mapping a Local Theology

In order to map a local theology at parish or Deanery level, there are a number of issues that require specific attention. Some of the key components and voices of local ecclesiological exploration are: (a) Church, (b) Parish, (c) Charism, (d) Culture and (e) Ministry. Collectively, they contribute to the theological framework that underpins parish life, faith and action. They are among the principal constituent ingredients to be taken into consideration when facilitating theological reflection. Taken together and consolidated by Scripture and Tradition, they form the building blocks of Mission.

Clare Watkins takes the view that the Christian community, engaged in pastoral discernment, needs to honour an ecclesiology of *traditio* where the Church is understood to be the place of divine revelation. As such, all the above ingredients and more, collectively form a 'a multifaceted dynamic within which the life of the church is thoroughly implicated'²⁹. The primary reality to be discerned and described, according to Watkins, is 'what is God doing within this particular situation, practice or experience'³⁰? The process of mapping a local theology demands an awareness and appreciation of the parish as sacred space where God's self-revelation is continuously unfolding and all the ingredients at play are anchored in the Trinity.

A fundamental ingredient underpinning all of this sacred network of ecclesial life is communication in all its dimensions. The frustration experienced when communication does not happen, intentionally or accidentally, provokes unnecessary and avoidable aggravation..

The local context will also include a regard for the socio-economic situation which can have a profound effect on people's attitude. If there is a recession going on, jobs and careers may be on the line. Low self-esteem will take its toll on key community personnel. This becomes part of the context that speaks to the theological reflection. To get a clearer picture of the whole context, theology needs to dialogue with local, social, historical and political analysis. Roger Haight's view that 'ecclesiology cannot be explored apart from the history of the

²⁹ Sweeney, et al, *Keeping Faith in Practice*, pp 163-176.

³⁰ Ibid p.174.

Church and the world in which it exists³¹ is entirely relevant to this point. The Church lives in a context and the local story has a contextual underpinning.

All the above elements are interwoven and have a role to play in mapping the evolving drama. They form the pastoral and practical hinges around which the community turns. As a 'map', according to Robert Schreiter, these components serve the purpose of 'orientation and evaluation'³². They form a useful guide when reflecting on the complex jigsaw of parish custom and practice. They also provide the vital signs for future pastoral planning.

The Eucharist is central to the whole parish identity as the 'source and summit'³³ of its being. People are drawn to the celebration and it remains a moment of enormous spiritual and social contact. The variety of people, the breadth of culture, the different generations and the multiplicity of needs, all combine to form a mysterious and challenging community of communities. John Paul II maintains that the Church 'draws her life from the Eucharist'³⁴. The celebration is the centrepiece of the community, providing spiritual nourishment and an opportunity for social interaction.

Sedmak highlights the fact that Jesus paid special attention to the poor, the excluded, the marginalised and the unwanted. To be in touch with the excluded is, according to Sedmak, important, because the encounter will change our attitude. The value of engaging with the parish assembly outside the Eucharistic celebration helps to generate community-building opportunities.

One of the potential pitfalls in mapping a new local theology is the presence of previous community theologies, but which are now perceived by some people as obstacles. They may well be described and interpreted as part of the traditional story of the community itself. Every parish has a history. An important part of the process will be to determine the evolution and present currency of such obstacles, if indeed they are obstacles. They may also, in Schreiter's view, be 'moments of revelation'³⁵. In the post Vatican II era for example, the removal of altar rails became a potential community flashpoint. Although these rails were

³¹ Haight, R., *Christian Community in History, Historical Ecclesiology*, Volume 1, Continuum, New York, 2004, p. 1.

³² Schreiter, R. *Constructing Local Theologies*, Orbis Books, New York, 1985, p.23.

³³ Flannery, Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* #10, *Lumen Gentium* # 11

³⁴ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Rome 2003, #1.

³⁵ Schreiter, p.28

interpreted by some people as a barrier to communion and a relic of the past, others revered their boundary significance as a demarcation between the sacred and the secular. Similar disputes arose about the position of the tabernacle and ambo, not to mention the introduction of lay people distributing communion. Even the sign of peace is seen by some as a vehicle for germ transfer.

A key strategy in mapping a local theology is listening to the local culture. This is a highly sensitive area as the story needs to be heard, understood and honoured. Not to do so, invites hostility and confrontation which are counter-productive and time-consuming. Parish communities are sensitive places. Schreiter sees that the development of a local theology 'depends on finding Christ already active in the culture as well as bringing the message of Christ to the culture'³⁶. An appreciation of the values and sensitivities inherent in the parish system, however flawed, is important. Instant change will simply spark resistance. In a parish pastoral setting, this interactive procedure is of paramount importance. The local voice shapes the local Church.

Transparency and communication become foundational cornerstones. A positive strategy is to invite the community to affirm the good things being done and to name those issues that require specific time and attention. If a community can be brought to the point of collectively naming the prime issues, they eventually take ownership of the process and the outcome, as they are participants in the process and not just recipients of someone else's decision.

Sedmak describes the local parish scene as the 'human face of culture'³⁷. For Sedmak, theological reflection on this is the second step. The human situation comes first. The human situation provokes questions 'because it is fragile'³⁸. Sedmak maintains there are implicit theologies at work in all of human life. These implicit theologies are our attitudes to life and our attempts to deal with the burning questions. They are sometimes more important than the explicit theologies because they are hidden, deeper and more powerful. They are like 'silent languages that shape the way we see the world'³⁹.

³⁶ Schreiter, p.29

³⁷ Sedmak, p.73

³⁸ Sedmak, p.74

³⁹ Sedmak, p.76

From a pastoral perspective, one of the most vulnerable and volatile areas of parish life is for example, liturgy. Inherent in the liturgy is an implicit theology with all the opportunities of positive and negative encounter. Balancing competing characters, attitudes and temperaments can absorb considerable time and effort. Yet the liturgy is of the highest spiritual importance both for the individuals concerned and the community they seek to serve. Liturgy incorporates its own culture and goes right to the heart of the community.

As Nicholas Healy emphasises, all theological reflection should be informed by doctrine. But if an ecclesiology stays 'with the ideal and fails to address the concrete'⁴⁰, it misses the mark. The concrete reality of parish life is a prize ground for the local Church to pause and reflect on its missiological role. According to John Paul II, 'the theological dimension is needed both for interpreting and solving present-day problems in human society'⁴¹. In *Centesimus Annus*, John Paul II wanted to place an emphasis, not so much on progress, but on human transformation and the dignity of the human person that is linked to that progress. John Paul defines progress as that which is related to the 'advancement of persons, not so much as having more but of being more'⁴².

1.8 Summary and Conclusion

In Chapter 1, I outlined the reasons, aims, objectives and scope of the study. I then outlined the design methodology and presented some of the challenges involved in mapping a local theology of this nature. I now move on to Chapter 2 which will explore the meaning and significance of some of the key terms and components that give life to ministry and shape the mission of the local Church.

⁴⁰ Healy, N.M., *Ecclesiology and Practical Theology*, from *Keeping Faith in Practice*, edited by Sweeney, Simmonds and Lonsdale, pp.117-128.

⁴¹ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, #55 1991.

⁴² John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 1979, #16.

Chapter 2 A Theological Framework of Ministry

2.1 An Overview of Church in South London

From my experience of working with people in a number of South London parishes over three decades, I have encountered a great diversity of perception, attitude and understanding towards the Church. Some people in parishes demonstrate an extraordinary loyalty which seems to be based on a combination of traditional inheritance, devotional allegiance, committed ministry and the sheer gift of faith.

The time investment in the local church is often substantial and, given the voluntary nature of the work, the pastoral results are quite astonishing. Church communities meet day after day, week after week, bonded together by an active faith. Seeds are planted that give life, hope and shape to this sacred space called Church. For those participants who are connected, committed and involved, the local church-based community becomes an anchor of life, a place to belong and a real encounter with the divine presence.

For others, however, the story is not so rewarding or positive. My experience of pastoral life indicates that some people walk away from the Church because of disappointment, disillusionment, anger, betrayal of trust or a perceived abuse of power. I have met people who have abandoned Church attendance because of a disagreement or a row with the parish clergy. Some parents walk away once the sacramental moments of baptism and first communion are celebrated as there is no longer any apparent reason for sustained continuity of practice.

Many young people walk away because, in their experience, the Church no longer speaks their language. Phil Dunn relates why she left the Church: because 'it excluded the vast majority from decision making, paid lip service to women and she saw no possibility of change'⁴³. She would, I'm sure, be greatly encouraged by Pope Francis in his recent exhortation; 'the feminine genius is needed where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures'⁴⁴. Francis recognises the pastoral fact that 'the entire people of God

⁴³ Dunn, P., Why I Have Left, from *The Furrow*, September 2005. P.467.

⁴⁴ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #103, Rome, 2013.

proclaims the Gospel'⁴⁵. There remains a tension however, between the ideal of inclusivity and its actual perception and practice in the Church.

The sensitivities at play in the life of the local Church are deeply complex. There is, in South London, a remarkable matrix of people who are affiliated to different churches and the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic presence and influence is highly significant. There is also a clearly identifiable clientele who turn up to honour the traditional rites of passage, such as Christmas, Easter, baptisms, weddings and funerals. It is difficult to say whether this latter group represents the 'believing without belonging'⁴⁶ syndrome highlighted by Grace Davey, or they are simply paying courteous tribute and honour to the particular occasion which happens to be celebrated in a Church building.

2.2 Themes in a Theology of Ministry

In order to understand the concept of ministry in the local Church, I shall now explore some insights from Vatican II, Thomas F O'Meara and David Heywood. I have chosen these three sources because they provide very challenging ideas in relation to pastoral ministry and they invite us to consider various models of ministry which, if accepted and implemented, could transform life in the local Church. While an ideal model can sometimes be far removed from reality, nevertheless it is always informative to consider what might be possible in the life of the people of God, situated in the local parish.

These three sources are important for this study because they articulate a bold and definitive vision of ministry for the Church as it struggles to engage with a globalised and complex culture. They are also important because the Church of today is constantly in need of renewal and these sources place the *Missio Dei* at the centre of a pilgrim Church that is always in transition through history and constantly reaching out to new generations.

Susan Wood makes the important point that an understanding of ministry in the Catholic Church today needs to be viewed with a clear understanding of the

⁴⁵ Ibid #111.

⁴⁶ Davey, G., *Religion in Britain since 1945, Believing Without Belonging*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1994. P.19

nature of the Church itself ⁴⁷. There is, according to Wood, a gradual, deliberate and historical movement from the theology of Bellarmine, for example, to a contemporary understanding of the Church as communion. Continuity, development and growth in the Church clearly take time. It is not a question of just discarding some previous model of Church and replacing it with another. Wood goes on to examine the Church as perfect society, mystical body, sacrament, communion and people of God but demonstrates a real sense of ecclesial development, balance and correction in the way that the Church actually evolves and is subsequently perceived in history. We shall see similar, successive themes about the nature of the Church emerge in the theological deliberations of Vatican II, Thomas O'Meara and David Heywood.

2.3 Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was the most important event in the life of the Catholic Church during the 20th century. Vatican II called for a theological and liturgical renewal emphasising the Church as a model of communion rather than just an institution. The Council repeatedly outlined and clarified the role of lay people in a number of major documents, notably *Gaudium et Spes*, *Lumen Gentium*, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Dei Verbum* and *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. The role of the ordained in the ministry and service of the Church was also specifically highlighted in *Presbyterorum Ordinis*. The Council changed the face of Catholicism in the modern world, giving identity and renewed life to the local Church where this study is based.

Reading these documents, there is a tremendous richness and vitality in the great and challenging themes of openness to the world, ecumenism, reform and renewal, collegiality and service, seeing the Church as the people of God and being invited to exchange dialogue and gifts with the world. In addition to all this, the reform and celebration of the liturgy in a familiar language was an astonishing moment of revelation and invitation to enter into the living mystery of the sacramental life of the Church. It could be argued that the changes to the liturgy have had the greatest impact in implementing the Council's vision of the

⁴⁷ Wood, Susan.K., "Continuity and Development in Roman Catholic Ecclesiology", *Ecclesiology* 7, no 2, 2011, pp 142-172.

Church. This Council opened many doors to the sacred and presented some fascinating opportunities and life-lines to the whole people of God.

The Council conveyed a clear message that lay people have the right, the duty and the responsibility to be actively involved in the work of the Church⁴⁸. 'May the way be clear for them to share diligently in the salvific work of the Church according to their ability and the needs of the times'⁴⁹. The Council actively encouraged lay people to pursue theological and scriptural studies⁵⁰ and it is lay people who are entrusted with taking the initiative in the transformation of the temporal order⁵¹.

These Council documents all present an ecclesiological vision for the Church which is invitational, collaborative and leaning towards a distinctive role of responsibility for Mission in the life of the local Church. It would seem that the Church doors are open to numerous possibilities which would enrich and enliven the pastoral landscape of every parish. While this vision is indeed inscribed in the Council documents, my experience over many years in South London suggest however that this invitation and opportunity has yet to be fully realised in the life and experience of actual parish communities on the ground.

There is encouraging evidence of ecclesial pockets of inspirational engagement and activity in some places, but it does not seem to match the suggested vision of ecclesial life enshrined in the Council and post conciliar documents. The Council goes to great lengths to articulate the distinctive ministerial nature of lay and ordained people in the service of the Church. Yet lay and ordained ministers often feel threatened by each other and there is some resentment of the prerogatives and privileges accorded to the ordained. Personality conflicts, unresolved disputes, lack of communication, an absence of clear job descriptions and financial inequalities all contribute to tensions that may be symptomatic of deeper systemic issues that have yet to be clarified. It could of course be argued that the Council Fathers were trapped between the historical legacy of Trent and the *aggiornamento* that John XXIII sought to initiate. It was an almost impossible landscape to bridge, let alone transform.

⁴⁸ *Lumen Gentium* #30,#33

⁴⁹ *Lumen Gentium* #33

⁵⁰ *Gaudium et Spes* #62

⁵¹ *Lumen Gentium* #31, *Gaudium et Spes* #43

However, the key documents of Vatican II do present a powerful and positive vision for the whole Church but the implementation of that vision seems to be a slow, truncated and evolving work in progress. One of the greatest challenges is the whole issue of theological reflection, formation and renewal. While Vatican II proposes on-going formation for both lay and ordained, the formation seems to proceed along very distinct and separate paths. It is difficult to see how the Mission of the Church is really served while the theology of the ordained and the theology of lay ministry is developed in isolation from each other. A significant problem arising from the Council vision is the absence of any systematic, practical plan for implementation or evaluation of parish renewal. It seems to rest in the hands of the willing, already overburdened with a crowded pastoral agenda.

The reason I have chosen these particular documents of Vatican II is that their teaching provides an immediate frame of reference for considering key questions on the Church. For example, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) calls for 'all the faithful to be led to that full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy'⁵². This is immediately relevant to the understanding and celebration of ministry which my research question seeks to explore.

The Decree on the Apostolate on Lay People (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*) asserts the right and duty of lay people to fulfil their mission in the world, to promote the common good, to educate their children as Christians and to engage in evangelisation. The mission of lay people, to which all are called by reason of their baptism, can attain maximum impact only through a positive, thorough and on-going formation. 'Just as the human person is continuously developing and new problems are forever arising, this formation should be steadily perfected'⁵³. There is a great challenge of engagement here for every parish community to pursue.

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) defines the nature, mission and identity of the Church in contemporary times and has had a huge impact on ecclesiology. Paragraph 12 addresses the prophetic nature of the

⁵² SC#14

⁵³ AA#29

people of God and highlights their charisms and gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit; 'the people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office'⁵⁴. The Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*) highlights the Church's understanding of how God continuously reveals himself to inform the Church's faith, life and mission. 'Access to the scriptures should be wide open to all the faithful'⁵⁵, because it nourishes God's people and enlightens their minds. If a parish community is to reflect on its journey, both the journey and the reflection need to be illuminated by the revealed word of God.

2.4 Thomas F O'Meara

O'Meara records an explosion of ministry in the Church following Vatican II which changed the patterns of parish life on a global scale. Parish ministry became a celebration of belonging through active service and ushered in a new model of ecclesial life that had all the dynamic hallmarks of collaboration and community cohesion. Catholics expected their parishes to address their lives and provide an anchor of hope as well as a place to belong. Following the Council, ministry began to foster and sharpen a growing awareness of a richer Christian life than mere attendance at Sunday Mass. The theology of the people of God soon took root and O'Meara attributes all this to a deep encounter between the Spirit of the risen Jesus and the people of God, in the Council itself. .

As he outlines the history and metamorphoses of ministry, O'Meara describes it as a 'mine awaiting new excavations'⁵⁶. Ministers of every century, he says, have argued that their form of *Diakonia* fulfilled the Spirit's reality of service to the Kingdom. He takes the view that ministry will continue to change in the church as she ploughs her way through history. But for some people of course, the pace of change is far too slow. O'Meara's presentation sounds impressive in prose form but has little or no connection with the reality of life in some parishes where ministers go about their tasks in their own way, often unaware of the value of communal reflection let alone the possibility of periodic formation. The

⁵⁴ LG#12

⁵⁵ DV#10

⁵⁶ O'Meara, T.F., *Theology of Ministry*, Paulist Press, 1999, p.23

real challenge in O'Meara's material is how to bring the ideas to life in the hidden corners of contemporary parish life in South London.

Every generation will contribute its own challenge and its own culture to the development of ministry. For O'Meara, the lesson of the history of ministry is that one generation should not claim an eternal superiority. Some people have a tendency to 'forget part of the past or fail to imagine the future'⁵⁷. Respecting tradition seems an honourable motive but does its observance create limitations that inhibit the Spirit? Ministry begins with the Spirit's charism and the enlightenment of grace. The goal of ministry, according to O'Meara, is to serve the Kingdom of God although he admits that sometimes the Church has a tendency to step in front of the Kingdom. He recognises that the evolution of ministry today can be held back by a failure in nerve to follow the Council, and also by those who assume a monopoly of power or who wish to retreat into small corners of the past.

Ministry for O'Meara is: doing something for the advent and presence of the Kingdom of God, in public, on behalf of a Christian community, as a gift received in faith, baptism and ordination, and as an activity with its own limits and identity existing within a diversity of ministerial actions'⁵⁸. While the definition makes ecclesial sense, its impact and significance is frankly lost in the massive cultural diversity of South London. Very few people engaged in parish ministry would actually identify with this description unless of course they were introduced to it in a formal process of formation.

Thomas O'Meara rightly draws our attention to language where the word 'ministry' has become a prize in some communities. He compares and contrasts today's community with that of the New Testament where language was used to empower ministry; e.g. preaching, evangelising, being sent, serving. Over time these terms evolved into a reservoir of beings; e.g. priesthood, clergy, hierarchy and office⁵⁹. The clergy-laity divide continues to have a negative impact for many people in today's Church. Like Heywood, O'Meara maintains that if one ministry, e.g. the ordained draws too much official activity to itself, it leaves

⁵⁷ Ibid p.135

⁵⁸ Ibid p.141

⁵⁹ Ibid p.152

many other people in a purely passive state and this kind of passivity stifles the potential that is inherent in baptism.

The reason I have chosen the theology of Thomas F O'Meara as a source for this project is that O'Meara maintains that the Kingdom of God is open to all, therefore, its ministrations are incumbent upon all. Ministry, for O'Meara 'is a continuing incarnation of the Word, and Jesus the Incarnate Word, the central event of Christianity, is not just a teaching but a reality'⁶⁰. For the parish community, ministry is a gift, an invitation to share in the life of Christ and an opportunity to belong to a community, continuously graced with the charism of the Spirit.

A key insight in O'Meara's theology is that baptism is actually the entrance into ministry and the context of that ministry is contemporary life in the local Church. For O'Meara, 'ministry begins with the Christian community, flows out of the community, and nourishes and expands the community'⁶¹. He sees the Church as a ministerial community that is also the Body of Christ and servant of the Holy Spirit'⁶². A further reason for O'Meara's insight is that he places significant emphasis on charisms and how the Holy Spirit works charismatically in the personality of each Christian'⁶³. He also explores a very particular calibre of formation that is based on an understanding of experience, collaboration and evangelisation which find their fulfilment in the mission of the local Church.

O'Meara's experience and appreciation of Vatican II is also an important reason to incorporate his views. He describes the Council as an epic event that has 'jostled centuries, shaken institutions, questioned religion, ending much and beginning more. The unquestioned past, a monolith in which every form and rule has its fixed place, shook and dissolved, not into secularity but into sacramental variety. Seeds were sown'⁶⁴.

⁶⁰ Ibid p.21

⁶¹ Ibid p.146

⁶² Ibid p.49

⁶³ Ibid p.54

⁶⁴ O'Meara, T.F., *A Theologian's Journey*, Paulist Press, 2002, p.256. 265.

2.5 David Heywood.

Coming from an Anglican background, David Heywood introduces a refreshing challenge of re-imagining ministry around the centrality of mission. A key characteristic however is that the process of re-imagining ministry is designed for the whole Church, the entire people of God and not just the ordained.

Heywood articulates the tiredness of ministry experienced by pastoral practitioners in the world of the 21st century. The struggle to reconcile the legacy of the past with an increasingly sophisticated culture of the present, has often given birth to fatigue and worse, a significant loss of talented personnel who have become disillusioned with ministry itself. Like O'Meara, he draws attention to the 'professionally educated clergy creating a passive laity'⁶⁵ but also discerns a significant dysfunction in the process; 'the marginalisation of the ordained'⁶⁶.

Heywood perceives that the task of the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is to discern what shape God's mission might take. Engaging the whole community in listening to the context, he tries to imagine the future. From pastoral experience, Heywood knows that people are searching for a faith that 'informs, empowers and integrates the whole of life'⁶⁷. He admits that people are leaving the traditional churches because they fail to encounter an effective level of care, integrity and outreach in parish ministry.

Apathy and indifference are significant factors in Church life today. People will only commit to what they believe will make a significant difference to their lives. For Heywood, part of the answer to the haemorrhaging Church crisis is a strategic but creative reimagining of our commonly accepted patterns of congregational life and ministry in order to respond to the direction in which God appears to be calling the Church in Mission. Knowing that God is active beyond the perceived boundaries of the Church, Heywood challenges every community to re-imagine the whole field of ministry with a Kingdom centred approach rather than the traditional Church centred one.

⁶⁵ Heywood, p.5

⁶⁶ Ibid p.7

⁶⁷ Ibid p.66.

Heywood's approach to reimagining ministry seems an attractive proposition because it invites ecclesial reflection to be focused on how an actual Church community see and understand themselves in the context of Gospel, culture and Tradition. Its introduction, however is fraught with risk. It does presuppose that everyone is prepared to see the necessity of widespread formation and reflection, to bring learning and ministry together in a way that ensures the Mission of the Church is given priority of place. It also presupposes an openness and agreed acceptability, particularly by clergy, on the reassessment of ministerial infrastructure, perhaps long established in parish communities.

The challenge inherent in this task is identifying, articulating and promulgating the process, the plan and the pastoral benefit of the collective evaluation of specific parish ministry. The practical exploration of such an innovative exercise needs to be introduced and implemented within a gradual context of positive parish renewal. What may be perceived as parish reconstruction, no matter how sensitively named or planned, is very likely to produce casualties.

Reimagining ministry is, however, a risk worth taking. Much depends on how it is done. Heywood maintains that adults learn best when 'their existing experience is respected'⁶⁸. Openness to the Spirit means openness to others. To invite and engage the whole community in pastoral reflection necessitates significant courage on behalf of the parish leadership as well as the parish members. Realising that we are all part of the story now and the story after us will be different because of us, is to embark on an exciting journey of pastoral renewal. Such a journey was clearly endorsed by Pope Francis in his recent Apostolic Exhortation; 'I encourage each particular Church to undertake a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform'⁶⁹.

From my experience of parish life in South London, there is a clear need for evaluation, reflection and reform that is graced with the calibre of imagination that Heywood champions. Perhaps his overall strategy is too demanding and too ambitious for present day pastoral practice, but the forensic principle of re-evaluating ministry in every parish carries a formational message worth hearing. We may never arrive at the perfect model of parish but sometimes the journey is more important than the arrival.

⁶⁸ Ibid p.144

⁶⁹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Rome 2013, #30

The reason I selected David Heywood for this project is the very definite invitation he presents to every community to reimagine ministry in the service of God's kingdom. For many people active in the today's Church, their ministry has become clericalised, tired and predictable. Some parish ministries are very public, professional and readily identifiable. But the hidden ministries of the Church like those involved in welcome, church cleaning, home visitation, care of the sanctuary, flower arranging, art work, book keeping, money counting and banking are all vital to the life of the ecclesial community, but they are seldom celebrated or shown appreciation for their ministerial stewardship.

People in parishes dedicate generous and unrecorded time to particular ministries in the Church. Heywood draws attention to all these ministries and simply invites them to reimagine or re charge their ministry. The real invitation of course is a challenge to our perception, to see this enormous diversity of ministry through the lens of the Gospel. Heywood presents a challenge for creative evaluation in the service of mission and we hear the very same invitation in the words of the present Bishop of Rome:

'Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: "We have always done it this way". I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities'⁷⁰.

Having identified and introduced my three prime theological resources, I shall now move on to explore some of the key constituents of parish life; Church, parish, charism, ministry and mission.

⁷⁰ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #33.

2.6 What is the Church?

There is no single image that fully captures the mystery, essence or meaning of Church. It is both a community of faith and a visible structure, but fundamentally, it is a community of disciples of Jesus Christ. The Church is a social phenomenon, holy and sinful, global and local simultaneously. The word itself takes its origin from the Greek word in the New Testament *ekklesia*⁷¹.

The Second Vatican Council was undoubtedly the most influential process for redefining and reshaping the life of the Church in the 20th century. Perhaps the best definition of Church for the purpose of the local community is 'the People of God' image articulated in Chapter 2 of *Lumen Gentium*⁷². Its location and definition ahead of the hierarchical or ordered communion of Chapter 3 of this seminal document, is hugely significant. It moves the focus away from the institutional image that carries so much historical and challenging baggage for some people.

This study of pastoral and practical reflection in the local Church takes its mandate and theological underpinning from the Council. In *Gaudium et Spes*, we find a definitive proposal for continuous pastoral dialogue among the people of God:

‘At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, if it is to carry out its task. In language intelligible to every generation, she should be able to answer the ever recurring questions which people ask about the meaning of this present life and of the life to come and how one is related to the other. We must be aware of and understand the aspirations, the yearnings, and the often dramatic features of the world in which we live’⁷³.

However, reading the signs of the times or engaging with the pastoral issues that come from it does not seem to develop or progress fast enough for some people. This perception of hesitation and immutability motivates many people to shop around for other Church options. While the invitation to engage in dialogue and conversation remains a key directive from Vatican II, parish communities are far too often confined to the rite, ritual and routine of parochial procedure. It

⁷¹ Stuhlmueller, C., (editor) *The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, The Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 1996, p.137

⁷² *Lumen Gentium* #13

⁷³ A. Flannery, (editor) *Gaudium et Spes* #4,

seems regrettable that more is not made of the Council's invitation at local parish level, but that kind of dialogue, discussion or debate initiative may well depend on the priest's perception and understanding of pastoral practice.

David Heywood makes the point that the Church is first and foremost a vibrant community of people, 'one of the most important networks in the locality'⁷⁴, and this community generates its own distinctive brand of community life in the immediate neighbourhood. The very existence of the community is undoubtedly influenced by the multiplicity of cultures that surround it. One of the positive characteristics generated by the Church community, according to Heywood, is the possibility it presents for people to come and go without being overwhelmed or drawn in to the mechanics or underlying infrastructure of parish life. The anonymous niche that Heywood describes is indeed a relevant factor in the ecclesiological equation of South London and some people value the habitual opportunity to worship and be fed from Word and Eucharist while remaining on the periphery of the established parish structure.

In the multi-cultural Church of South London particularly, there is evidence of ethnic personnel, one parent families, refugees and isolated individuals who seem quite content to be part of the Church assembly without any indication of permanent status or community belonging. The task of identifying them, reaching out to them and presenting a model of Church that actually cares for their spiritual welfare and development is a vital aspect of community life. Here again however, the evangelisation imperative seems to be dependent on the ecclesiological view of the incumbent priest as well as the pastoral team which may or may not be in place.

Heywood rightly argues that relationships are at the heart of the Church and he draws attention to the value of belonging to a Church community where 'God and the world, sacred and secular aren't boxed up neatly and separately but rather where life and faith are integrated'⁷⁵. This is a positive dynamic where planned pastoral engagement and evaluated community action can lead to gradual appreciation, cohesion and growth.

⁷⁴ Heywood, D., *Reimagining Ministry*, SCM Press, 2011, p.40

⁷⁵ Ibid p.39

The local Church is the place where people first encounter the Gospel and the person of Jesus. From a formation point of view this needs to be a positive and life-giving experience. The presence or absence of welcome, openness and hospitality will always convey an important message to the stranger. It is also of strategic benefit to the regular, routine parishioner who might welcome the opportunity to explore what it means to belong, as well as the possibility of active ministry.

Inevitably, the Church generates an extensive variety of people who are all at different levels of awareness and pastoral engagement. One of the most difficult challenges is to address the negative perception held by some people because of a perceived gap between the institutional Church and the individual. Those who value the Church connection have to live their lives at the interface of the sacred and the secular. There are also those who have left the Church for a variety of reasons and, if engaged in conversation, could provide an informative and insightful agenda for any ecclesiological process of reflection.

From my own experience of pastoral life and ministry, the opportunity and invitation for people to come together and discuss Church issues has always been a worthwhile encounter. In many cases, public perception is fed by the media which carries its own particular slant on Church material. In his exhortation to the Church, Pope Francis quite openly admits that there are 'ecclesial structures that can hamper efforts at evangelisation. Structures are only helpful when there is a life constantly driving, sustaining and assessing them'⁷⁶. He then specifically invites 'each particular Church to undertake a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform'⁷⁷. This is an open invitation to the pastoral and practical engagement that Vatican II championed.

The actual parish community is a key element in facilitating the implication and impact of this invitation. It is to the parish we now turn as we proceed to identify and explore a network of components which collectively contribute to a gradual understanding of the theological framework of ministry.

⁷⁶ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #26

⁷⁷ Ibid #30

2.7 The Challenge of the Parish in Context

The parish context, where this project is focused, is a highly complex reality. It is a sacred space where people connect with each other and the treasures of the ancient Tradition. It is a place where people gather, welcome each other, hear the Word, celebrate the sacraments, learn about faith and witness to the world. It is also a place of personal contact where a communion of relationships is woven together.

At a recent conference on ecclesiology, Richard Gaillardetz made the point that 'the whole purpose of the Church is 'to illuminate the person of Christ and the purpose of your parish is to facilitate that illumination'⁷⁸. While this challenge is central to the Mission of the parish, it is also quite difficult to keep in focus when you are confronted with a formidable array of pastoral issues that require significant time and attention. With a multitude of things to do, and an unrealistic expectation of delivery, it is easy to lose sight of the spiritual and pastoral imperative. This is particularly true for a priest working alone. Time management in a parish setting is not only a crucial skill to acquire but an essential factor for the overall service of the people of God.

The diminishing number of priests is now beginning to have a very significant impact on parish life. There was a time when every parish was guaranteed its own resident priest but that arrangement is now beginning to evolve into a system of clustering, amalgamation and the formation of pastoral areas. Parishes in South London however, are slightly cushioned from this experience at the moment, mainly due to the presence of significant numbers of foreign priests working in parishes that have previously been served by indigenous clergy. The imported clergy solution, however, while it fulfils an immediate need, merely buys time.

There is no doubt that most of the priests now serving in parishes were trained for a style of priesthood and ministry that expected them to work on their own. The prospect of now sharing responsibility and accountability with lay people and working collaboratively with them in a different pastoral arrangement, is new and deeply challenging to both the ordained minister and lay person alike.

⁷⁸ Gaillardetz, R. National Conference on *Ecclesiology, Communion and Co-Responsibility*, Ireland, September 2012.

Vatican II restored the great diversity of ministry in parishes and specifically encouraged clergy to 'promote the dignity and responsibility of the laity in the Church, to willingly use their prudent advice, and encourage them to undertake works on their own initiative'⁷⁹. From my experience of parish life over three decades, this particular view of the Council is not always implemented as it was intended. The present parish structure where a priest is ordained, appointed, 'sent in' and ceremoniously inducted, tends to sustain the tradition where lay people tend to defer to the priest, investing him with sole authority and jurisdiction in the community. Such a system underlines Heywood's view that a professionally educated clergy can indeed produce, and sustain, a passive laity.

The parish is part of a wider pastoral area known as a Deanery. While the clergy of the parishes in each Deanery meet periodically on a formal basis to discuss issues relevant to their ministry, there is still an inherited tendency to retain an autonomous hold on the individual parishes entrusted to their care. Parish boundaries, traditions and protocols are securely established over many generations. James A Coriden points out that the Council of Trent (1545-1563) stressed hierarchical authority and clerical leadership to such an extent that it left lay members of the Church 'in a purely passive role'⁸⁰. While many lay people are certainly involved in parish life, and deeply committed to pastoral care, there is still an innate tendency, indeed an expectation, for the priest to have the final word. Pastoral traditions, once established, generate a particular perspective which may be right for their time but they also require serious evaluation to discern their impact on the Church of today.

The parish is still a product of history and successive generations do their best to operate within the inherited boundaries. It is interesting to note that the 1983 Code of Canon Law defines the parish as 'a certain community of Christ's faithful within a particular Church, whose pastoral care, under the authority of the diocesan Bishop, is entrusted to a parish priest as its proper pastor'⁸¹. The shift of emphasis from territory in 1917 to people and ministry in 1983 is an important development. It brings home the fact that the community of Christ's faithful are at the centre of the Church's life. Territoriality is still an aspect of the

⁷⁹ Lumen Gentium #37

⁸⁰ Coriden, p32

⁸¹ *The Code of Canon Law*, Collins London 1983 c515

1983 Code. However, the military and Anglican Ordinariates show that there can be exceptions to the general principle⁸².

The parish community remains an integral part of the Church and can only be fully understood within that context. In *Christifideles Laici*, John Paul II views the parish as 'the church placed in the neighbourhoods of humanity'⁸³. In *Catechesi Tradendae* he describes the parish setting as 'the pre-eminent place of catechesis'⁸⁴. The pastoral implication of these statements presents a significant challenge to the parish and those entrusted with its leadership, care and development. Handing on the faith depends to a great degree on how parishes are managed and resourced. The long tradition of school led catechesis has now given way to parish based formation especially for sacramental preparation. So from a pastoral point of view, the parish is the powerhouse of the local community.

Parish evaluation and local Church renewal is hard work but it facilitates growth and opens the door to new frontiers as well as new people. It should not be perceived as a threat to anyone involved if the evaluation process is open to the whole community. Pope Francis reflects this; 'the parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the missionary creativity of the pastor and the community'⁸⁵. It is worth noting that Francis places 'pastor' and 'community' side by side. The collaboration expected and the co-responsibility inferred demands quality time, reflection and commitment.

⁸² Code of Canon Law, c.372#2 and c.518.

⁸³ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, Rome, 1988, #27

⁸⁴ John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, Rome, 1979, #67

⁸⁵ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* #28

2.8 Gifts and Charisms in the Local Church

There is no doubt that the number one resource in every parish community is its people, together with all their gifts, charisms and talents. Indeed no parish would survive if it were not for the biblical generosity of so many gifted people who are willing to share so much of themselves, their time and resources. The essence of the parish community is that it attracts people from all walks of life and each one brings extraordinary gifts to share.

The term charism comes from the Greek word *charisma*, often translated as 'gift' and has its sources in the Pauline literature of the New Testament. The Body of Christ image that Paul uses is a powerful illustration of the local Church at work in the world. It is worth recording that Vatican II identified the charisms and gifts of the people of God and actually called them 'special graces'.

'Allotting his gifts according as he wills, he also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church, as it is written, 'the manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit' (1 Cor.12:7). Whether these charisms be very remarkable or more simple and widely diffused, they are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation since they are fitting and useful for the needs of the Church. Those who have charge over the Church should judge the genuineness and proper use of these gifts through their office not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to what is good'. (1Thess 5:12).⁸⁶

Here, Vatican II offers a very important perspective for each individual member of the parish community. The ecclesial distribution of gifts and charisms is random, generous, purposeful and extremely varied. They are meant to renew and build up the Church, the people of God. The presence of charisms is the work of the Holy Spirit and in the words of Pope Francis, 'these (charisms) are not entrusted to a small group for safekeeping, they are channelled into an evangelising impulse'⁸⁷ for the whole Church. The Council does however place significant responsibility on the leadership of the local Church to discern, appraise and 'judge' the genuineness, the authenticity and use of such gifts. Such a statement seems to assume that every Church leader is endowed with quite an extraordinary depth of wisdom, perception and pastoral insight so as to engage in the identity, formation and celebration of individual gifts.

⁸⁶ Flannery, A., (editor) Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* #12

⁸⁷ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* #130

The real value of the parish community is that it acts like a magnet, attracting a great variety of people with a great diversity of gifts. The challenge for the parish leadership is to identify the gifts and empower their hosts to use them in the service of the Gospel. Indeed *Lumen Gentium* asserts that 'each believer has the right and duty to use them in the Church and in the world in the freedom of the Holy Spirit who "breathes where He wills" (John 3:8) ⁸⁸.

Thomas O'Meara takes the view that a theology of ministry is actually a theology of grace and 'ministry begins with the Spirit's charism'⁸⁹. O'Meara defines grace as the presence of Jesus and his Spirit within the faithful, the Body of Christ. Such a view implies that a great reservoir of giftedness rests among the people of the local Church, manifested in their gifts and talents. The challenge to release the power of the Spirit is an important one that requires a prominent place in any local community evaluation. O'Meara goes on to identify a number of obstacles that would hold back such a development. He draws attention to a 'solipsistic ⁹⁰ view of priesthood which could result in mediocre and passive men interested 'not in service but in performance'⁹¹.

The pastoral challenge implied by O'Meara's comments is that sometimes clergy can effectively stifle the gifts of people by their pastoral attitude, or, perhaps by the absence of their pastoral judgement and insight. I have known a situation where a newly appointed parish priest went into a parish and dismissed sixty extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion overnight. The impact of the rejection on the ministers as well as the broader community was devastating. Having met some of the casualties afterwards it was difficult to reconcile the perception of being unwanted and no longer able to exercise their ministry because of a blatant abuse of power by the priest. The fact that they were called from the community, commissioned by the Diocesan Bishop and were willing to serve the people of God with their time and ministry, no longer seemed to matter. The subsequent perception of the priest by the rest of the community was severely tarnished because he had taken on a settled community as 'an outsider' and disempowered them. It was difficult to see what

⁸⁸ Flannery, A. (editor) *Vatican II*, AA#3

⁸⁹ O'Meara, T.F., *Theology of Ministry*, Paulist Press, New York, 1999, p.24.

⁹⁰ Solipsism – the term comes from Latin *solus* (alone) and *ipse* (self). Solipsism is an epistemological or ontological position that knowledge of anything outside of one's own mind is unsure.

⁹¹ O'Meara, p25.

he had to gain. His own credibility, as well as his ministry in that community was significantly undermined. Other parishioners simply shopped around for an alternative model of Church that focused on service rather than domination.

Perhaps it was to address this distorted image of priesthood that John Paul II issued an apostolic exhortation on the formation of priests. 'The priest is a man of communion, in his relations with all people he must be a man of mission and dialogue'⁹². Entrusted with this kind of responsibility in the community, the priest himself needs mature and experienced people-skills as well as the charisms of discernment, empathy and compassion, in order to bear witness to the Gospel he is called to serve. Given the multi-ethnic nature of South London, he also needs an appreciation of the multi-cultural factors at work in the community as we shall see in the next section.

⁹² John Paul II, ' Priests are there to serve the faith, hope and charity of the laity. The ministerial priesthood conferred by the sacrament of holy orders and the common or "royal" priesthood of the faithful, derives from the one priesthood of Christ'. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* Rome, 1992, #17, #18

2.9 Ministry – Servant of Mission

What is Ministry?

When you look at the life and energy of the parishes engaged in this study, there are numerous people involved in some form of ministry, although they may never refer to their work or indeed see their involvement as a 'ministry' at all. Parish life as we know it today, would not exist if it were not for the substantial number of people that are deeply committed to the heart and infrastructure of the community itself. Their involvement generates the life of the parish and provides the welcome and the receptivity that attracts the stranger as well as the regular member to a particular community. The mystery of pastoral ministry is that successive generations of people are drawn into the life and work of the Church through a particular parish role which is associated and related to the sacred.

No theology of ministry is possible unless it is based on the ministry of Jesus. The word Ministry itself is a translation of the Latin *Ministerium* which in turn is derived from the Greek *diakonia*. John Collins traces *diakonia* to Acts 6:1, where it means service in the distribution of food to the poor and in Acts 6:4 as referring to the 'ministry of the Word'⁹³. The Gospel texts indicate that Jesus himself was sent by the Father, so the ministry of Jesus comes from God: 'You are my Son, the beloved, my favour rests on you ' (Mk1:11); 'Everything is entrusted to me by my Father' (Mt.11:26); 'Did you know that I must be about me Father's business?' (Lk 2:49); God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son' (Jn 3:16). 'Here am I among you as one who serves' (Lk.22:27). These texts, and others, reveal that Jesus' ministry is based completely on love and service to other people.

Jesus came to proclaim the Kingdom and the reign of God, but Thomas O'Meara takes the view that the ministerial distinction emphasised between clergy and laity has divided the Church in two⁹⁴. O'Meara refers to the controversial track record of the Church across history, assuming political status and ministerial privilege. Even to the present day, the ministry of the ordained tends to dominate the ministry of the baptised. Yet the official teaching of the

⁹³ Collins, J., *Deacons and the Church*, Gracewing Morehouse Publishing, UK 2002, p.6

⁹⁴ O'Meara, T.F., *Theology of Ministry*, Paulist Press, New York, 1999, p. 28.

Church is that the ministerial priesthood is actually 'at the service of'⁹⁵ the common priesthood.

One would assume from this teaching that the ordained would empower the people entrusted to their care and foster a sharing and co-responsibility of ministry. Instead we often find in parishes that the opposite is the case. This imbalance of ministry may well be due to some degree on the method of formation experienced by clergy who spend six years training in a seminary where the life-style is significantly isolated from regular pastoral life experience. Students for the priesthood require philosophical and theological formation but this inherited system may well lend itself to attracting a certain kind of mentality which generates and sustains a certain culture of difference.

From the Council of Trent in the 16th Century, the Catholic Church tended to restrict ministry to the ordained. A pyramid image of church emerged following Vatican I (1869-1870) with pope, bishops, priests and laity forming a cascading tier of power and responsibility. Following the Second Vatican Council, however, there was an explosion in ministry triggered in the pastoral field. John Ford views this development as 'communion ecclesiology'⁹⁶. In 1972, Paul VI in his apostolic letter, *Ministeria Quaedam*,⁹⁷ restored lay ministries which were to be conferred by some form of installation other than ordination, preparing the way for the development of ministry in the local Church.

When you look at some parishes, however, the actual practice of ministry is not always inspirational. Some people seem to hold on to their ministry as a possessive status of acquired seniority or security. In an ideal pastoral setting, a rotation of ministerial roles and responsibilities would ensure that several people have the opportunity of participation. However, much depends on the perspective shown by the parish leadership, especially the priest. Unless the historical or inherited system of parish life is challenged to change, the status quo remains the norm. The result is that new arrivals encounter defensive resistance and can easily get the impression of a closed shop mentality.

⁹⁵ 'the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood'. Catechism of the Catholic Church #1547

⁹⁶ Phan, P. *The Gift of the Church*, from *Ministries in the Church* by John Ford, Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 2000 p. 300.

⁹⁷ Paul VI, *Motu Proprio: Ministeria Quaedam*, #3: Ministries may be assigned to lay Christians; hence they are no longer to be considered as reserved to candidates for the sacrament of orders. Rome 1972.

The question must be asked as to whether the Church is being poorly served by its historical, rigid hold on office and ministry. Pope Francis posed the same question recently: 'Perhaps the Church appears a prisoner of its own rigid formulas, perhaps the world seems to have made the Church a relic of the past, unfit for new questions; perhaps the Church could speak to people in their infancy but not to those come of age'⁹⁸.

O'Meara maintains that the Church (and its leaders) 'either calls forth ministers out of the community, or it dies'⁹⁹. This seems to place the leadership of any parish community in a strategic position of discernment and facilitation. It also assumes that the leadership of the parish, namely the parish priest, is actually open to the involvement of people in every area of parish life. Training, formation and evaluation are fundamentally important for whatever ministry they seek to serve.

O'Meara's ultimatum of pastoral death is disturbing but worth noting. Parishes can be full of untapped potential, but eventually grow stale and reach a point of stagnation because of the absence of invitational leadership. In South London, with the presence of so many people from different cultures waiting to be involved, the ministerial opportunities, if taken, are limitless.

David Heywood maintains that 'ministry is the task of the whole church'¹⁰⁰. Heywood asks for a radical re-imagining of ministry away from the inherited structures that have grown tired and functionary. He wants to bring learning and ministry together as a pastoral reason for theological reflection in the community which will keep the call to Mission at the top of the agenda. Heywood's dream of an ecclesiological revolution entails a tough realignment of attitude and mind-set, requiring systemic change at every level. Training, deployment, responsibility, accountability and recovery of the experience of the first disciples will all culminate in a Mission-centred church, learning to 'do a few things and do them well'¹⁰¹.

Heywood's vision of focusing exclusively on Mission and relinquishing structures of power seems like an attractive proposition until the logistics of the

⁹⁸ Pope Francis to the Brazilian hierarchy, 28 July 2013.

⁹⁹ O'Meara, T.F., *Theology of Ministry*, Paulist Press, New York, 1983, p.178.

¹⁰⁰ Heywood, D., *Reimagining Ministry* SCM Press, 2011, p.150.

¹⁰¹ Heywood, p.204.

actual change are attempted. Yet, such vision and perestroika¹⁰² may well point the way to a new model of Church emerging. In Heywood's view God is always active outside the immediate, self-imposed boundaries of the Church. Perhaps a further opening to this new vision is found in the Eastern Orthodox perspective of John Zizioulas, where he notes the common tendency to focus on the Church's historical institution by Christ rather than its constitution by the Holy Spirit. 'Constitution is something that involves us in its very being, something we accept freely, because we take part in its emergence'¹⁰³. Clearly, how we understand 'the Church' will impact substantially on how we live its ministry.

¹⁰² Perestroika – Russian for *restructuring*, associated with Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980's.

¹⁰³ Zizioulas, J., *Being as Communion*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York, 1985, p.140

2.10 What do we mean by Mission?

The world is changing at an astonishing speed. The parish in South London has to come to terms with demographic shifts in population, constantly changing technology and the fact of secularisation. But this changing world is exactly where the local Church lives and the challenges emerging serve to sharpen and shape its mission. The Church 'placed in the neighbourhoods of humanity'¹⁰⁴, cannot remain aloof from such change but must engage with it in order to present a significant presence and response to those who search for the spiritual in life.

All ministry is a servant of mission. From Vatican II we hear that 'In the Church there is diversity of ministry but unity of mission'¹⁰⁵. Mission is the prime reason and foundation of parish life and action. The Council reveals that 'the pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature'¹⁰⁶ since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin in accordance with the decree of God the Father. The Church's presence in the world plays a crucial role as it personifies the divine presence in creation and it is in the local Church especially that the whole dynamic of mission is played out among the people of God. As God's co-workers, the whole parish community exercises their priestly, prophetic and royal office which is entrusted at Baptism.

According to the Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, the whole parish community is given an extraordinary and sacred objective; 'to exercise their apostolate in the world as well as in the Church'¹⁰⁷. The opportunity to witness and evangelise is a great ideal of the Council but the reality may not necessarily always reflect the Council's intention. There is a significant emphasis given to the family who, in an ideal ecclesial context, will shine out in an exemplary Christian way, for the immediate world to see.

'The mission of being the primary vital cell of society has been given to the family by God himself'¹⁰⁸. The decree goes on to deliver an extensive list of qualities and heroic acts that the family can do to witness to the gospel in the

¹⁰⁴ John Paul II *Christifideles Laici*, #27

¹⁰⁵ *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, #2

¹⁰⁶ *Ad Gentes*, #2

¹⁰⁷ AA#5

¹⁰⁸ AA#11

wold. While the ideal family image portrayed in this document sounds virtuous and paints a picture of impressive spiritual magnanimity, the reality of family life on the ground in the typical South London parish does not exactly match the one intended by the Council.

The complexity of family life in South London reflects the vastly complicated jigsaw of a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic composition. Life today is composed of one parent families, families in financial crisis, blended families, fragmented families, domestic partnerships, multiple partners, grandparents raising grandchildren, unemployment, racial tension and more. There are, of course, numerous examples of the traditional nuclear family but It is to the broader family reality, in all its complexity, that the mission of the Church must find a place, a voice and a hearing. Mission takes place in a given context and as David Heywood remarks, both gospel and Church are themselves shaped by that context..

The task of the local Church, according to Heywood is to discern what shape God's mission might take. Community mission, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, involves 'a careful listening to the needs of the context'¹⁰⁹. Heywood maintains that mission is not an optional extra, but integral to the life of the Church. It is a calling of all God's people and not just a few. He further highlights the pastoral need to create a space for 'the searching, the broken and those alienated from the traditional Church'¹¹⁰. Heywood's articulation of the pastoral priority is to engage the whole community is a process of discernment so that God's mission is honoured and actioned in that particular context.

When it comes to discerning Mission, an integrated process of discernment and prayer is undoubtedly required. So too is an invitation for the whole community to be engaged in the exercise as a permanent commitment rather than just a seasonal exercise. The parish community holds a unique place as it has the capacity and the drive to bring the Mission of the Church into real time, real context and real people.

¹⁰⁹ Heywood, D., *Reimagining Ministry*, SCM Press, London 2011, p.58.

¹¹⁰ Ibid p.39

2.11 Summary and Conclusions

In Chapters 1 and 2 of this paper, I established the aims, objectives and scope of the work, as well as outlining the design methodology which will be used throughout the project. I also explored some of the key components of mapping a local theology in order to appreciate the various challenges embedded in the local Church. The parish incorporates and struggles to hold in balance, a challenging jigsaw of Church, parish, gift, culture, ministry, scripture and tradition, all combining to serve God's Mission in the local Church.

From my own experience in working in the multi-cultural world of South London, there is an acute pastoral need to understand the composition of the local Church as well as its context in order to work effectively within its complex life. If we do not try to read the signs of the times and appreciate their origin, context and trajectory, the whole exercise of ministry will remain at the purely surface level of ritual engagement.

We now move on the next stage of the process. In a way, this is an exercise in apologetics. Alister McGrath maintains that one of the most important skills in apologetics is the willingness to listen to people¹¹¹. By questionnaire and interview among 5 local parishes, it will be interesting to hear what the level of understanding is of grassroots ministry at parish and Deanery level. Theological reflection on gleaned insights will serve to illustrate and articulate lived parish experience and application. In the words of David Heywood; 'If we are to contextualise the Gospel effectively, we need insight into the mind-set of the people to whom we wish to bring it. This journey of discernment will reveal the powers that dominate their lives'¹¹².

The value of theological reflection being linked to parish practice is the opportunity it presents to stop, look back, look around and look forward so that the Divine presence may be recognised and celebrated in the familiar context of the local Church where faith is recognised as vital to life. 'Faith in God anchors people, giving them stability and purpose'¹¹³.

¹¹¹ Green, M., & McGrath, A., *How Shall We Reach Them?* Word Publishing, 1995, p.23

¹¹² Heywood, D., *Reimagining Ministry*, SCM Press, London 2011, p. 103.

¹¹³ McGrath, A., *Bridge-Building, Effective Christian Apologetics*, Intervarsity Press, England, 1992, p.226.

Chapter 3

The Local Understanding of Ministry Today

An Empirical View by Questionnaire and Interview

3.1 Research Steps

To fulfil the ethical requirements of the empirical section of the study, I made a formal request for approval to the ethics department of King's College and approval for the project was secured ¹¹⁴. Permission for the project was also required, requested and given by the Archdiocese of Southwark ¹¹⁵.

3.2 Methodology

This research called for both quantitative and qualitative procedures. These two approaches need each other in order to form a thorough understanding of ministry among parishioners across five parishes. Both approaches serve as a 'validating triangulation factor'¹¹⁶ so that a more comprehensive impression of today's understanding of ministry may be articulated. To focus exclusively on one approach would result in quite a limited map of perception and understanding. In this 'mixed methodological design' ¹¹⁷ the integration of both methods informed each other and extended the breadth of the inquiry.

It is important to appreciate the challenge of concurrent integration of qualitative and quantitative methods while analysing both text and numerical data. Cresswell observes that 'timing, weighting, mixing and theorising'¹¹⁸ are all

¹¹⁴ E&M Research Ethics Panel, Kings College, 27th July 2011. Letter received from Daniel Butcher, Research Ethics Administrator. REP (EM) 10/11-70. See Appendix 2.

¹¹⁵ Smith, P., Archbishop of Southwark, 19th October 2010. See Appendix 1

¹¹⁶ Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrison, K., *Research Methods in Education*, Routledge, London and New York, 2007, p.141, (quoting Campbell & Fisk 1959) Triangular techniques 'explain more fully the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint, so by using both quantitative and qualitative procedures, concurrent validity can be validated.

¹¹⁷ Cresswell, J., *Research Design, Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, Sage Publications, 3rd Edition, London 2009, p.203ff.

¹¹⁸ Cresswell, J., p. 206, The researcher has to decide how to time the interviews with the questionnaire (timing) how much priority to give to each (weighting) how and when to mix text, images and numbers (mixing) and what kind of overall theory may be emerging. (theorising).

factors for careful consideration. A 'concurrent triangulation strategy'¹¹⁹ helps to determine areas of convergence, difference or combination.

3.3 Quantitative Research

In order to get an understanding of ministry at parish level, a questionnaire¹²⁰ survey was conducted among 5 Roman Catholic parish communities in South London. This was primarily aimed at and distributed to people directly involved in the life of their communities. Twenty people, specifically involved in some aspect of parish ministry, in each of the five parishes were targeted so that experienced and reflective feedback would be ascertained. They were selected from a Deanery database of people compiled the previous year¹²¹. The questionnaire was also available on line in the Deanery website throughout the month of May 2012. It was, therefore, also accessible to other parishes, so a broader response was in fact possible.

Aware of the multi-ethnic nature of the target audience in South London, I thought it would be informative to discover how multi-ethnic the actual response would be. In many cases the parish community has become a safe haven for migrants, both legal and 'undocumented'. While many migrants bring their gifts of faith, family cohesion and culture into the local community, there is a certain hesitation and reluctance to actively engage with any official documentation or procedure that requires a written response. The fact that the questionnaire was anonymous, however, should significantly reduce any perceived threat. A real challenge was to make the questionnaire sufficiently attractive and appealing to those people in the five parishes for whom English was not their first language.

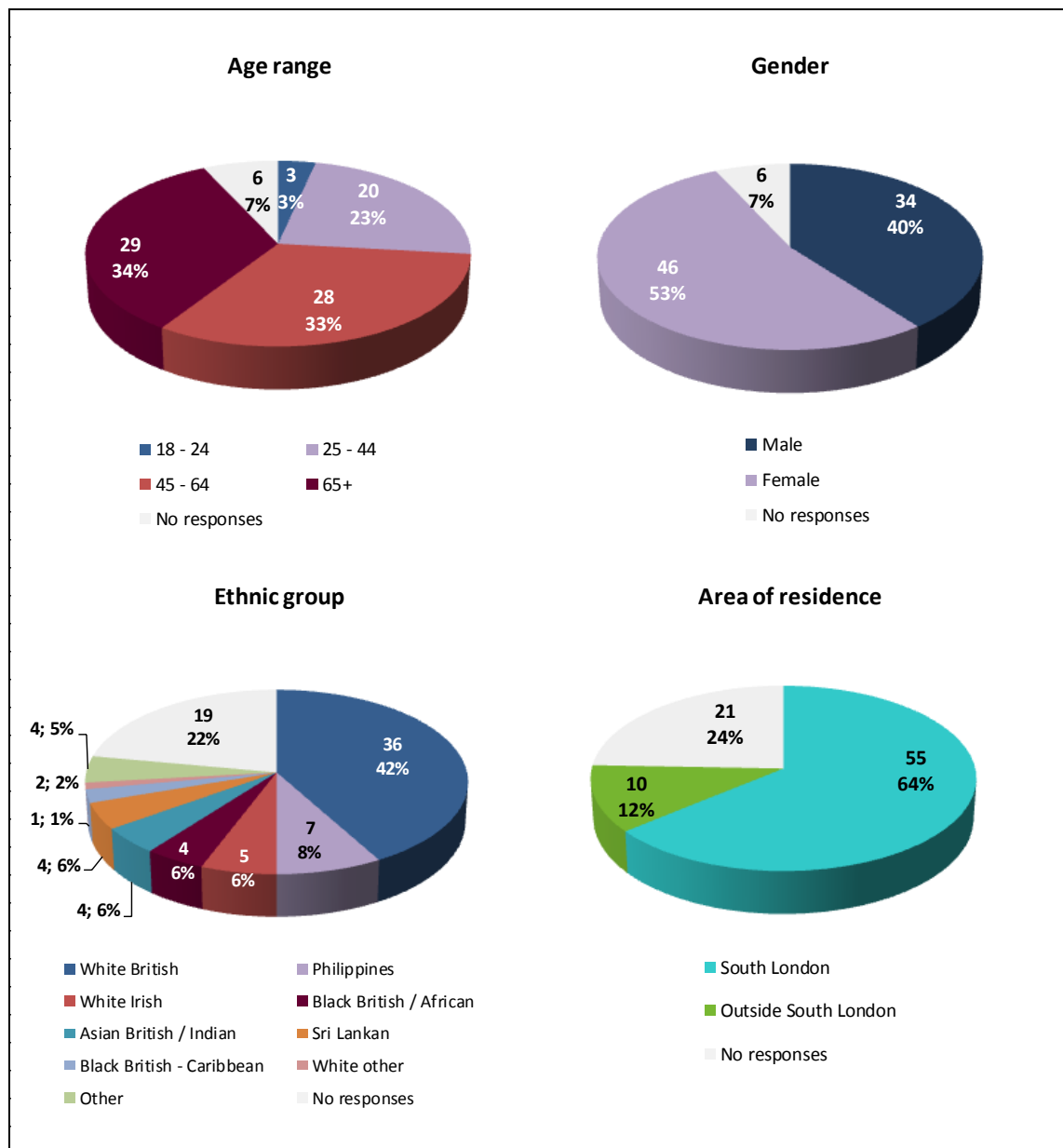
¹¹⁹ Cresswell, J., p.215 using more than one procedure to verify findings.

¹²⁰ Questionnaire – see Appendix 1

¹²¹ In 2011 there was a number of meetings in the Deanery for the introduction of the new Roman Missal. Participants were asked if they were willing to take part in an anonymous survey and they agreed.

Demographic profile of Respondents

(These charts can be seen with greater clarity on pages 104-105).



The data was collected in a one shot basis. To determine geographical locality, respondents were requested to indicate in their profile whether they resided in South London or outside South London. The result indicated that 55% resided in South London and 12% came from outside the area. 24% chose not to indicate their area of residence at all. The majority of respondents indicated white British origin but there was also a variety of other nationalities to reflect the multi-ethnic landscape of the area. I did consider providing translations of the questionnaire in other languages pertinent to the multi-cultural environment, but rejected it because of the huge multiplicity of languages and dialects

involved. To provide translations in a few, selective languages may be perceived as a bias towards them. While 53% of respondents were female and 40% were male, there was still a fair balance in this category with just 6% not indicating gender. The age profile was leaning towards the higher side of the scale but this could also provide significant evidence of experiential knowledge and reflection.

The quantitative procedure is important for reliability and complemented the qualitative dimension of the project. Quantitative methodology can convey precision and accuracy by analysis of numerical data. It can measure reactions and attitudes of people, identify areas of focus and articulate causation. It can also miss contextual detail for which the qualitative dimension compensates with substance.

The purpose of the questionnaire was not just to discover statistical information but also to invite people to reflect on their motivation, their time, their activity and involvement at local parish level. The questions created the opportunity to trace the source of involvement and to identify some of the missing links e.g. in formation and training. The exercise 'allowed people to cross from a world they already know to one they need to discover'¹²². The questions deliberately drew attention to parish practices because these practices are doors to the sacred. Parish practices e.g. liturgical activity, catechesis, communication procedures, ushering or welcome and hospitality are all strategic moments of pastoral contact and apologetic engagement between Word and world. Mary Clarke Moschella takes the view that 'some people are willing to express in writing what they are unable to say out loud'¹²³.

However, as Alister McGrath points out 'each person has his or her unique difficulties about faith and must not be reduced to a generalised stereotype'¹²⁴. While there is a real necessity for summarising the results and extrapolating key themes, care must be taken to honour the responses so that the haecceity¹²⁵ of the perceptions is not lost in a collective network of generalisation.

¹²² McGrath, A., *Mere Apologetics*, Baker Books, Michigan, 2012, p.127.

¹²³ Moschella, M.C., *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, Cleveland, 2008, p.78.

¹²⁴ McGrath, A., *Mere Apologetics*, p.17.

¹²⁵ Haecceity – (hek'si:iti/, from the Latin *haecceitas*, which translates as 'thisness') is a term from medieval philosophy first coined by Duns Scotus which denotes the discrete qualities,

3.4 Qualitative Research

Swinton and Mowat make the point that qualitative research is a method of exploring the way that human beings encounter their world. It is a way of 'seeing and discovering'¹²⁶ through experience and rigorous, reflective interpretation. In this project such research draws a map of reflection on parish ministry at work in the local Church.

Ten selected key people (two per parish) were interviewed for qualitative data. In addition, two ordained ministers were also interviewed. These twelve participants (purposive sampling ¹²⁷) were chosen because of their particular leadership skills, involvement and experience of theology on the ground. The questions for the interviews were chosen from the questionnaire data. I will now pay particular attention on the key priorities emerging from the questionnaire and interview analysis because this will point towards the key findings. The purpose of the interview exercise is to get a 'rich and thick description' ¹²⁸ of the project question as it will add qualitative data to the emerging themes.

The *Interview Guide Approach* ¹²⁹ was used for conducting the interviews. Interviewees were informed in writing of the motive, plan, purpose and approval of the research procedure. Their consent was required and secured in writing, as their participation was voluntary. Each interview lasted about 45 minutes and the interviewees were given the questions in advance. Their permission was sought for audio recording and transcripts were written up afterwards. Transcribing the interviews seemed time-consuming but it was a valuable exercise as additional insights were gleaned from phrases that could otherwise have been lost. With the permission of the interviewees, notes were also taken during the sessions for contextual purposes, noting gestures and non-verbal

properties or characteristics of a thing which make it a *particular* thing. Haecceity is a person or object's 'thisness'.

¹²⁶ Swinton & Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, SCM Press, London 2006, p. 38

¹²⁷ Cohen, Manion and Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*, 2007. P.114. Purpose sampling in this context is used to access knowledgeable people in order to capture in-depth information from people in a pastoral position to give it. In this study, random sampling would be lacking in quality insight.

¹²⁸ Swinton & Mowat, p.46

¹²⁹ Cohen, Manion and Morrison, p.353. This increases the comprehensiveness of the data, making it systematic, conversational and situational.

expressions. The venue for the interviews was decided by mutual agreement and the interviewees were aware that they could stop the interviews at any time.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison make the point that data may be contaminated if care is not taken to preserve the integrity of the process. In this study, due care has been taken to avoid 'the selective use of data, unfair telescoping of data or neglecting the negative while accentuating the positive'¹³⁰. This was done by audio recording the interviews, then transcribing them and carefully arranging the material so that all the insights, comments and observations were noted. Eventually, the qualitative material was cross referenced with the quantitative data, and the key findings were extrapolated in Part 4 of the thesis. In addition, all data was stored in a locked safe in my office. I was the only key holder. Results of interviews were written up, coded and stored in a password controlled computer for classification.

James Sweeney takes the view that parish pastoral practices 'need to be interpreted, assessed and theologically understood in their concreteness'¹³¹. Moschella makes a similar point that reflecting on parish practices 'can reveal notable gaps between theology and practice'¹³². Both authors articulate the need for parish practices to be critically appraised in the interest of the common good. Alister McGrath maintains that 'Christian theology is at its best and most authentic when it engages and informs the life of the Christian community on the one hand and is in turn engaged and informed by that life on the other'¹³³. A discerning questionnaire targeted among those who are actively engaged in ministry has the potential to produce some enlightening and informative views.

One of the prime reasons for conducting this survey by questionnaire and interview is to invite experienced practitioners to reflect critically on the way parish practices are now, while allowing the possibility of a vision to form of what they might become. As Martyn Percy observes, however, 'new is not necessarily better than old, fresh is not necessarily superior to established, and

¹³⁰ Cohen, Manion and Morrison, p.145-146.

¹³¹ Sweeney, J., p.22.

¹³² Moschella, M.C., p.49

¹³³ Ward, P., *The Cultivation of Theological Vision: Theological Attentiveness and the Practice of Ministry*, Pete Ward, (editor) *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, William B Eerdmans Publishing Co. Cambridge, 2012, p107.

effervescence is not a substitute for substance’¹³⁴. Nevertheless, this study pursues the idea that the process of theological reflection and evaluation is the key to future pastoral and practical planning at local Church level. Percy’s views serve as a reminder that we cannot constantly reinvent the wheel in parish life, but the process of critical reflection is a valuable asset as it goes some way to preventing staleness and routine from shaping the dynamic of pastoral engagement.

The distinctive characteristic of theological reflection, according to Robert Kinast, is that ‘the source material is human experience’¹³⁵. Experience in this case is specific, current, concrete and personal. The purpose of theological reflection on experience is to recognise and articulate the presence and grace of God at work in the process. The phenomenological insights gained will contribute to Part 4 of this thesis: the extrapolation of findings into pastoral themes and parish priorities.

We now turn to the results of the questionnaire and interviews. Both sources of data will be used, because, as Michael Quinn Paton indicates ‘qualitative data puts flesh on the bones of quantitative results’¹³⁶.

¹³⁴ Percy, M. *Evaluating Fresh Expressions*, edited by Louise Nelstrop and Martyn Percy, Canterbury Press, 2008, p.36

¹³⁵ Kinast, R.L., *Let Ministry Teach, A Guide to Theological Reflection*, The Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 1996, p.1

¹³⁶ Paton, M.Q., *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation*, Sage Publications, London 1987, p.38.

A Commentary on the Questionnaire and Interview Process

The 1983 Code of Canon Law articulates the rights of the faithful to make known their pastoral needs and to share their views with Church authorities¹³⁷. The creation of Parish Pastoral Councils¹³⁸, Diocesan Pastoral Councils¹³⁹ and Diocesan Synods¹⁴⁰ are all structured to discern the insights and aspirations of the community of all the baptised. The Bishop of the diocese is also obligated to visit each parish in his diocese at least every five years¹⁴¹.

These structures exist to facilitate an exchange of information within the ecclesial community. However, while all these organisations provide the opportunity to express opinions and views in a public forum, the value of this questionnaire is that it provided experienced people in parishes with the opportunity to express in some detail, realistically and anonymously, their views about the Church in general as well as the local church in which they live.

From 100 questionnaires sent out to experienced parish personnel, 86 were returned. The questionnaire contained 16 questions designed to extract a factual account of parish life and ministry. As the response to the questionnaire was anonymous, respondents could be as honest and as objective as they wished. I also gave respondents the opportunity to volunteer for interview if they wished their views to be explored further. It is worth noting that 76 of the questionnaire respondents are actively involved in local parish ministry, while 10 describe themselves as 'regular parishioners with no direct involvement'¹⁴².

¹³⁷ The Code of Canon Law, Collins, London 1983, C. 212 #2

¹³⁸ Ibid C. 536.

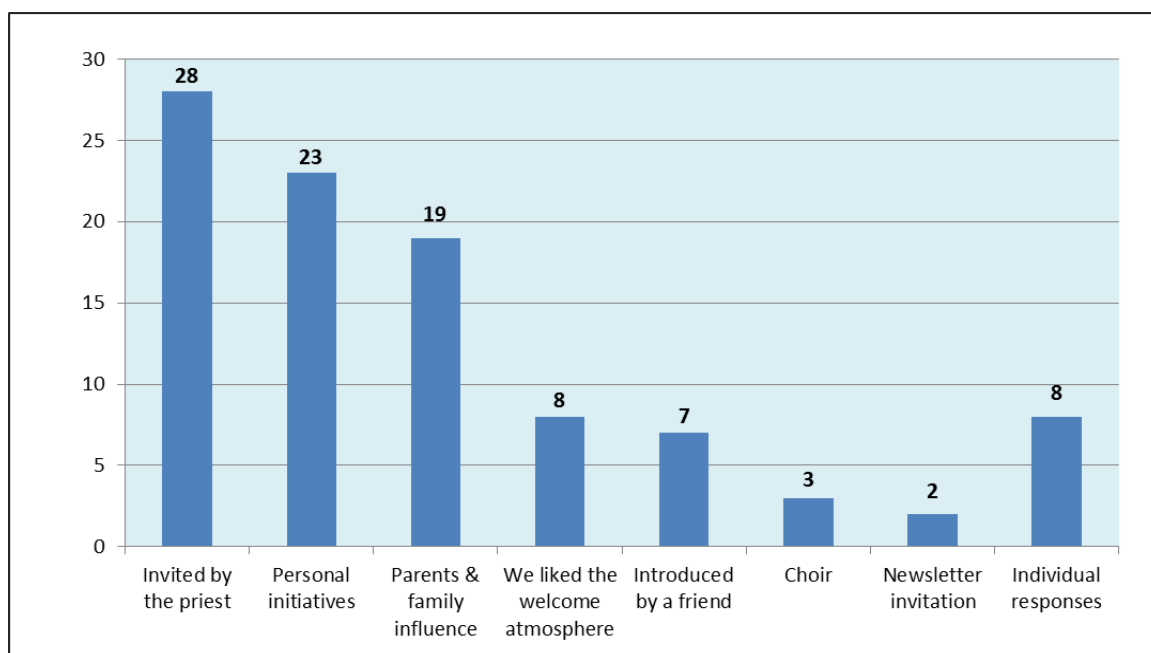
¹³⁹ Ibid C. 511.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid C. 460 – 468.

¹⁴¹ Ibid C. 396 #1

¹⁴² Questionnaire, question 2

Question 1 - How did you first get involved in parish life?



The following comments are individual responses to this question

Reader	Sacristan
School governor	Welcomed by another parishioner
Appeal from lead catechist	Altar server
Union of Catholic Mothers	Sodality cell group at university

Note: There were 86 responses in total but 12 respondents indicated numerous methods of parish introduction and involvement. e.g. someone invited by the priest was also encouraged by parents. This explains the overall number of 98 which includes the individual responses.

Asked how they first got involved in parish life, 28 respondents indicated that they were invited personally by the priest, 23 became involved by personal initiative and 19 owed their involvement to parental or family influence. The remaining reasons varied from being introduced by a friend to a feeling of being at home in a welcoming parish community.

The response to this question provides evidence of the pivotal role played by parish leadership in inviting people to become actively involved in parish life. The invitation receives its mandate from Vatican II where the 'full and active participation by all the faithful is the aim to be considered before all else' ¹⁴³.

Most of the interviewees were involved in the Church from childhood. Parental and family influence was acknowledged as a major reason for their engagement. Some indicated that they drifted away from the Church once they left home and went off to university¹⁴⁴. The new-found freedom of university life quickly provided an extensive menu of other voices claiming and getting their attention. Once exposed to life away from home, for these interviewees, the opportunity to look back and reflect, tended to generate a multiplicity of questions about Church tradition, procedure, practice and power. Some of the interviews indicated problems in understanding the institutional trappings and structures¹⁴⁵ of the Church: its laws, regulations, controversial teachings and policies.

A number of the interviewees revealed a sense of being trapped in parish ministry once a personal invitation was accepted¹⁴⁶. The invitation or request to help out with any area of parish ministry, but especially sacramental programmes like Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation or RCIA seems to be open-ended with no terms of reference included. Once one was part of the team, it was somehow expected that s/he was there on a permanent basis. While many were content with this arrangement, some people grew weary of the anticipated time commitment. The interviews reveal that the absence of any specific 'rules of engagement' and, in some cases, the absence of training or formation, contributed to the loss of valuable people who felt 'taken for granted' and consigned to an annual programme of catechetical activity with little or no opportunity for review or evaluation.

The interviews reveal that specific talents like music, drama, sports or an interest in the development of young people were positive springboards towards further involvement and commitment at parish level. Two of the interviewees

¹⁴³ *Vatican Council II, The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #14.*

¹⁴⁴ Interview No 2

¹⁴⁵ Interview No 1

¹⁴⁶ Interviews No 4, 8, 10,

who started out their Christian journey as Anglicans became involved through music and liturgy before converting to Catholicism in later life ¹⁴⁷. Both indicated their reasons for 'switching sides' was a combination of factors such as the controversy about the ordination of women priests, the feeling that there was 'something missing from their Anglican roots' and the desire to belong to a church that seemed to have less internal turmoil at the centre. While both interviewees admitted to having no regrets there was also an awareness that some of the issues that triggered their decision to convert to Catholicism, were also beginning to appear on the Roman Catholic agenda. Both of these participants also stressed the value of music, liturgy and formal prayer in attracting people to become involved in the life of the Church.

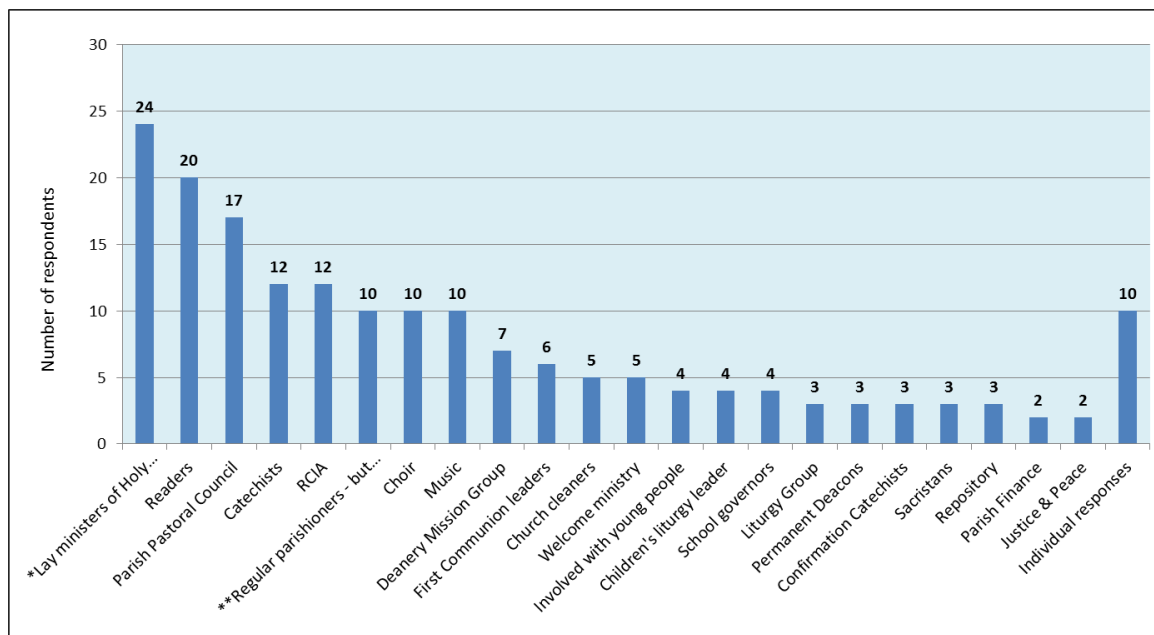
An important consideration for one interviewee¹⁴⁸ was her experience at University where she had the opportunity to explore issues relating to social justice and morality. The university chaplaincy presented a platform of debate between right and wrong which became a formative moment in her life. She went on to devote her entire career to young people, but there is a regret that some opportunity of moral, ethical formation could not be offered when she first joined her home parish. The main focus was a weekly stale ritual which was presented as obligatory. The Sunday Mass was perceived as entirely predictable and seemed to lack any real engagement with the lives of people. While it drew people together, it came across as a lost opportunity.

¹⁴⁷ Interviews 4 and 5.

¹⁴⁸ Interview No 2

Question 2 –

What is your ministry in the parish?



*Lay ministers of Holy Communion

**Regular parishioners - but not directly involved

The following comments are individual responses to this question

Parish secretary	Contact person for parish organisations
Usher / collector	Teams of Our Lady
Parish magazine editor	St Vincent de Paul
Landings	Group Leader
Safeguarding	Bereavement ministry

Note: All 86 respondents replied to this question but some people exercise more than one ministry. Hence the total of 179 ministries (including individual responses). 10 respondents describe themselves as 'regular parishioners but not directly involved'.

The range and scale of ministerial experience recorded in response to this question adds value to the perceptions expressed. It also lends substance and credibility to the overall outcome.

The questionnaire indicated that 76 respondents exercise 179 ministries in parish life. This implies that some people exercise more than one ministry in the community. If there was a pastoral policy of one person / one ministry, the scope for involvement of more people would be significantly increased. However, this would necessitate a change of mind-set so that people are encouraged to see the bigger ecclesial landscape. Ten people indicated that they were 'regular parishioners but not directly involved'¹⁴⁹. Their response was valuable in that it may reflect a broad attitude of believing in the value of the parish community but not being immediately involved in it except by their weekly physical presence at the liturgy. The unknown factor here is why these 10 respondents have chosen to remain outside the usual ministerial framework. It could be that attendance on Sunday is all they require or it could also be that they do not feel they are drawn by the usual menu of parish activity. The fact that they completed the questionnaire is an indication that they are not just casual attendees.

One of the interviews revealed the presence of 'anonymous Catholics'¹⁵⁰ in the community who seem quite content to be there on Sunday and not necessarily become further involved in any specific area of parish ministry. For them, the church fulfils a basic need as a place of worship. A death in the family, the birth of a baby or the prospect of a place in school usually triggers a first step practical inquiry. However, the perception of the parish as a 'filling station' where people show up for their weekly spiritual ration may well be valid for some people.

Another interviewee indicated the fact that she has lived out her ministry in the school where she works, rather than the parish where she lives, because she found the parish structure to be 'too regimented and restrictive'¹⁵¹. Involved in Catholic education all her life, she discovered the school environment to be much more flexible, adaptable and open to creative liturgy, music and drama.

¹⁴⁹ Questionnaire question 2

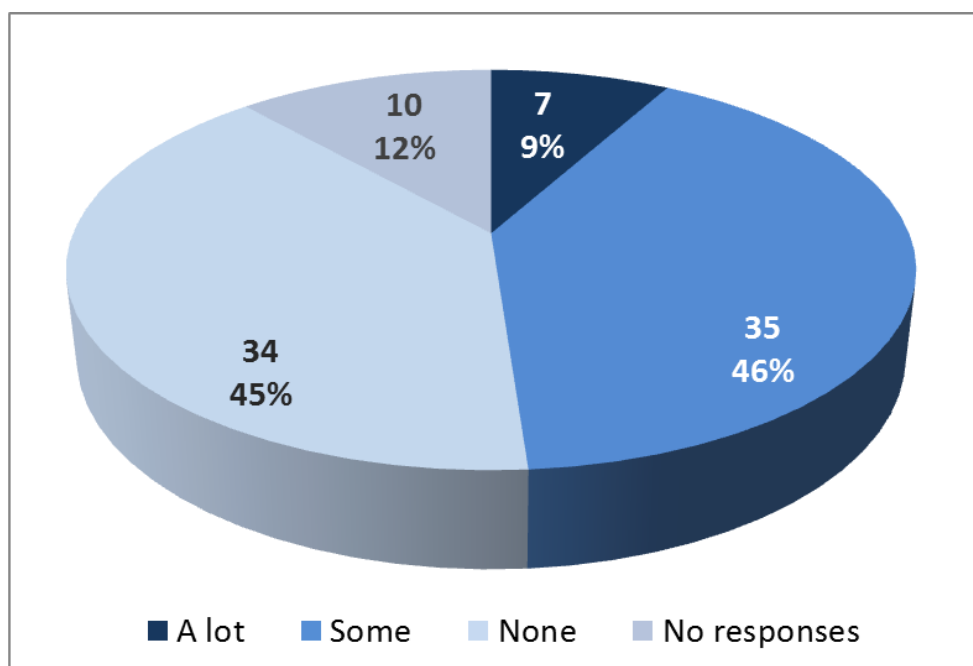
¹⁵⁰ Interview No 6

¹⁵¹ Interview No 8

This in turn captured the minds of young people as it provided greater opportunities for involvement, participation and understanding. This interviewee was disappointed at the absence of creative opportunity in the parish and deliberately chose to focus her energies and commitment among the young people entrusted to her care at school. Her view is that it is better for the young people to experience life-giving, age related liturgies which have some significant relevance to their lives, rather than subject them to a weekly routine that has, in some parishes, long grown stale and tired.

Question 3

What pastoral training did you receive in relation to the work you do in the parish?



An interesting profile of training and formation was revealed where 35 respondents indicated they had some pastoral training for their role in the parish, 34 others indicated they had none at all, 7 respondents considered they had received quite a lot of preparation while 10 did not reply to this question. The response to the question seems to indicate that for most people involved in parish work, learning on the job seems to be the norm but training and formation was beginning to have a positive impact. It gave those who experienced formation a broader understanding of what the parish and its ministries were meant to embody.

The provision of recollection days for readers and Lay Ministers of Holy Communion was appreciated, but there is evidence from the interviews of little or no formational opportunities for other ministries¹⁵². The impression perceived is that readers and Lay Ministers seem to be of more value in some way. The unintentional neglect of other ministries was noted as a flaw in overall pastoral planning.

¹⁵² Interview No 6.

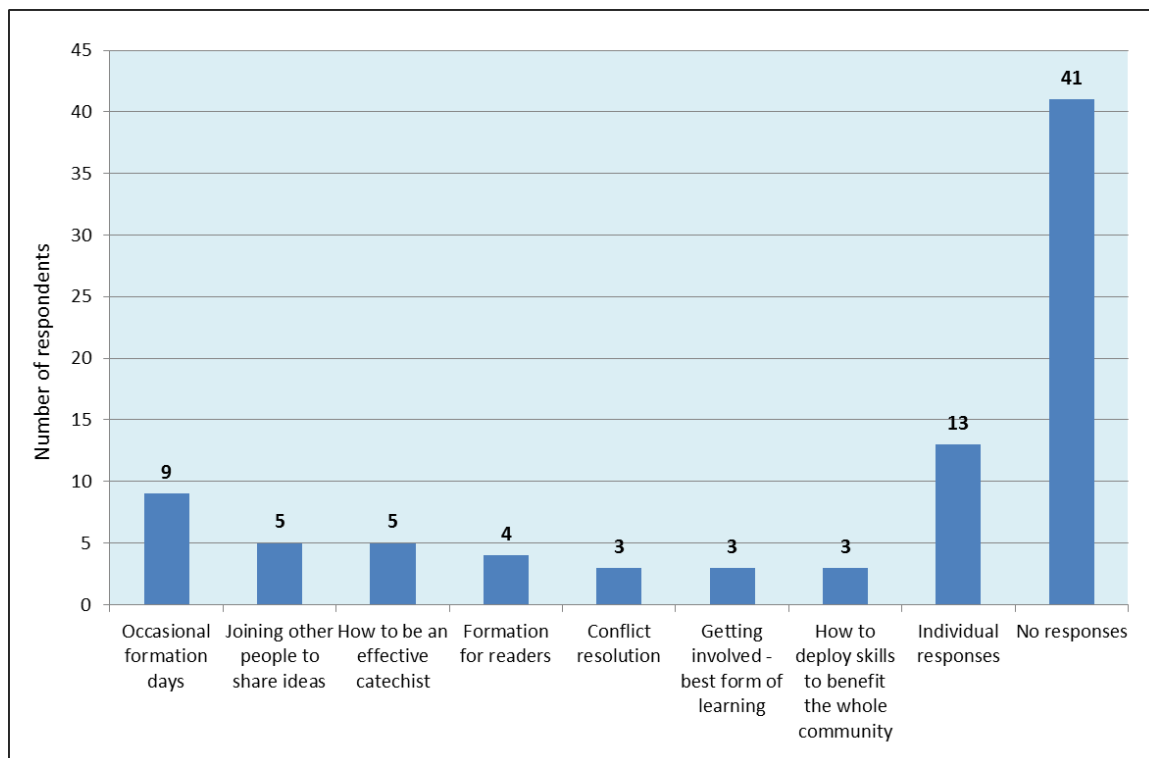
The interviewees expressed some appreciation for the formation opportunities that were made available. Their location, however, was considered to be problematic because of the geographical distance involved if the formation was at a Diocesan Centre, as opposed to a more local parish or Deanery venue that was more accessible. Many people involved in parish ministry are working full time and with families to support. Time is an issue.

One interviewee observed however, that 'if the commitment to a particular area of parish ministry was really there, the formation opportunity would certainly be taken up as it would be seen as an investment for the future'¹⁵³. The implication is that while some people rejoice in their ministerial role and welcome the opportunity to learn more about it, others may feel trapped in the role, or struggle to find the time to balance their ministry with other commitments such as family and career.

¹⁵³ Interview No 3

Question 4

What kind of formation or training would you value most?



The following comments are individual responses this question

How to share responsibility for parish life	Reflection on the scriptures
Keeping up to date with church teaching	Effective decision making
Keeping up to date with I.T.	Family values
A day on parish communication skills	Group leadership skills
A day for clergy on how to value their people	Linking church teaching to every day living
Formation day on forms of prayer	Deanery workshops in music & liturgy
Hospitality - in various cultures	

There was a desire expressed for periodic formation days, which would include opportunities to exchange best practice in catechesis with neighbouring parishes. Among the requests articulated was the need for affirmation and formation on how to be an effective catechist and how to deploy existing skills for the benefit of the whole community.

A request was also recorded for some formation for clergy on how to value their people. While this was an isolated request from the questionnaire, the reason behind the request was more obvious in the interviews where there was a clear perception that clergy lacked the ability to delegate effectively or to appreciate or deploy the wide range of talents in their congregations. This particular aspect seemed to point to the absence of any real pastoral strategy in deploying the parish's number one resource: its people. One of the interviewees said that the parish priest gave the impression of wanting people to do more, but time revealed that the priest's intention was more of an aspiration rather than a collaborative plan.

'I think the challenge is actually how to get people more fully involved and agree with the idea that once you identify talent and then how in fact you can put them into place and how you can make them work and how you can actually get that talent to be more utilized. In some cases it's also helping lay people develop their leadership role and their skills and I think that is a job particularly for parish priests because they have to identify what their own ministry is like and my experience of parish priests is they can be quite different. Some can be quite autocratic and some can be quite democratic and some can be none, collaborative in theory but not in practice, so they agree to be collaborative but they actually don't be collaborative'¹⁵⁴

The need for formation surfaced in another interview where the candidate indicated the extent of talent and skill available among lay people but noted that the formation was not always adequately provided:

'I feel that many people, many lay people, have lots of time, talents and experiences which they can offer to the church. They can actually lead loads of different things in the church without the priest actually being present. But formation and training is always very important, unfortunately many people have only perhaps a GCSE in RE (Religious Education) as their basis for trying to understand the church, and of course they have their own living faith, but to take roles as Catechists or to lead different groups, formation is certainly necessary'¹⁵⁵.

¹⁵⁴ Interview No 7.

¹⁵⁵ Interview No 9.

Another interviewee maintained that catechesis and formation were fundamental and essential in preparing the way for people to take ownership and responsibility in parish life:

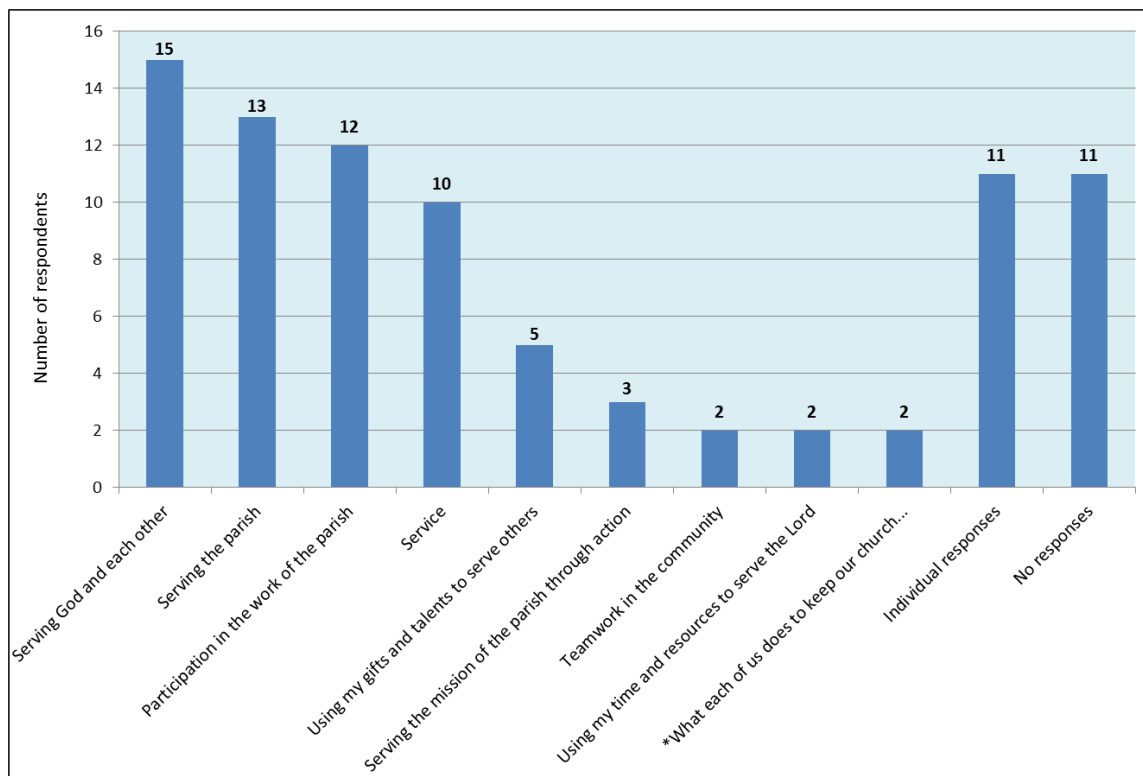
‘if we are wanting to encourage people to have a greater sense of ownership and responsibility and to offer their abilities, then, you can’t really do that without good formation, and how you do that is another question’¹⁵⁶.

It is worth noting however that 41 respondents did not reply to this question at all. It may be that they did not understand the formation aspect of ministry or appreciate that formation was actually available or possible. It could also be that they are content with their present situation and do not see the need for formation. If this is true, it draws attention to the issues of awareness and understanding of how these respondents actually see their ministry or if they see it as a ministry at all. The next question, however, may throw some light on this issue.

¹⁵⁶ Interview No 6.

Question 5

What do you understand by ministry?



The following comments are individual responses to this question

To give something back to the parish which has given me so much	Living my faith
Giving my very best to what I do in the parish community	There are no boundaries to ministry in the parish
Clergy	Living out my baptismal vocation
Listening to Christ and practicing my faith	Sharing Christian values
Handing on the faith	My ministry does not start and stop at the church door – it is more than this.
Being with people where they are and trying to off-set messages from Rome that are clearly out of touch	

The actual understanding of ministry brought a wide range of definitions to the surface. The words 'serving' and 'service' occurred 48 times in the questionnaire response. The idea of ministry as some kind of service to God and neighbour was uppermost in the responses. The use of time, teamwork and gifts as participation in parish life was also important for some respondents. Living out the baptismal vocation, living out the faith and sharing Christian values was another view expressed. So, clearly from the questionnaire, ministry serves 'something beyond itself'¹⁵⁷.

It is worth noting from the responses to this question that only one person understood the term 'ministry' as pertaining to the job description for clergy. This may well be evidence that the understanding of ministry has indeed moved on. One respondent made clear that their ministry did not start and stop at the church door: it was a way of life for them. Another articulated the understanding of ministry as being with people wherever they are at in life. The perceived authoritarian attitude of Rome generated conflicting loyalties. The implication here, which was more clearly expressed in the interviews, is that there is resistance to a model of ministry which denies inclusive participation by everyone in the community¹⁵⁸. There was disappointment in the fact that some respondents were committed to their ministry at parish level, but their children and families showed no inclination to follow their example.

A contrasting understanding of ministry came from one of the interviewees:

'For me parish ministry is about encountering God, helping people to encounter God, to see God in their life and to see God in everyday life in the world and around us and especially in the community. So it's about people who are there and people who come to the church just because they are curious, and welcoming them to the church and perhaps starting with them a journey of faith'¹⁵⁹.

The interviews conveyed the need for formation and catechesis in all aspects of parish ministry. It is only when people understand their role fully that they can bring it to life. Time was acknowledged as an obstacle as most people involved in ministry have work and families to sustain. The implication here for parish life and ministry is that most catechesis or on-going formation for young people

¹⁵⁷ O'Meara, p.75.

¹⁵⁸ Interviews No 1 and 2

¹⁵⁹ Interview No 9

stops at the Sacrament of Confirmation and there is no further faith development until marriage.

Overall, there was a very positive understanding of ministry articulated particularly in the questionnaire. Similarly, all of the interviews started off their understanding of ministry in positive tones. It was only as the interview focused on the minutiae of ministry, that some negativity surfaced. The negativity emanated from perceived abuses or flawed perceptions of ministry, especially in regard to long established 'well intentioned'¹⁶⁰ parishioners hogging their roles and resisting any form of change.

More serious reservations were expressed in the interviews particularly from female participants in regard to certain ministries not being available to everyone. Two of the interviewees regarded the Church as being very authoritarian with regard to ministry:

'In my view, because of this structure that we have, which is incredibly difficult to change, it's a bit like the last sort of huge big despotic regime in a sense, and if we look at what's happening in the Arab Spring, and if we look at what's happening throughout the world, the sense of accountability, the sense that you don't just do what you're told by authority without questioning and then being accountable. That's your sort of problem, that's associated with huge ingrained sexism, and that's a huge problem. When it's a question of coming down to parish level and what's going to happen, that's such a big question..... I used to think that.....we.....in a sense it was a sort of good thing because not having so many priests enable laity to take on more roles but that is not happening.¹⁶¹

This interviewee is clearly disappointed in the way that Vatican II has been interpreted and implemented with regard to ministry. There seems to be much greater 'official' support for ordained personnel than there is for lay people and especially women.

There was disappointment from the interviews that more people could not be engaged to exercise and celebrate ministry. There seems to be a very valuable opportunity knocking on the door but only a handful of people seem to be drawn in to the actual life of ministry itself. Most of the parishes seem to have significant numbers of people attending on Sunday, but the vast majority seem to be content with mere presence.

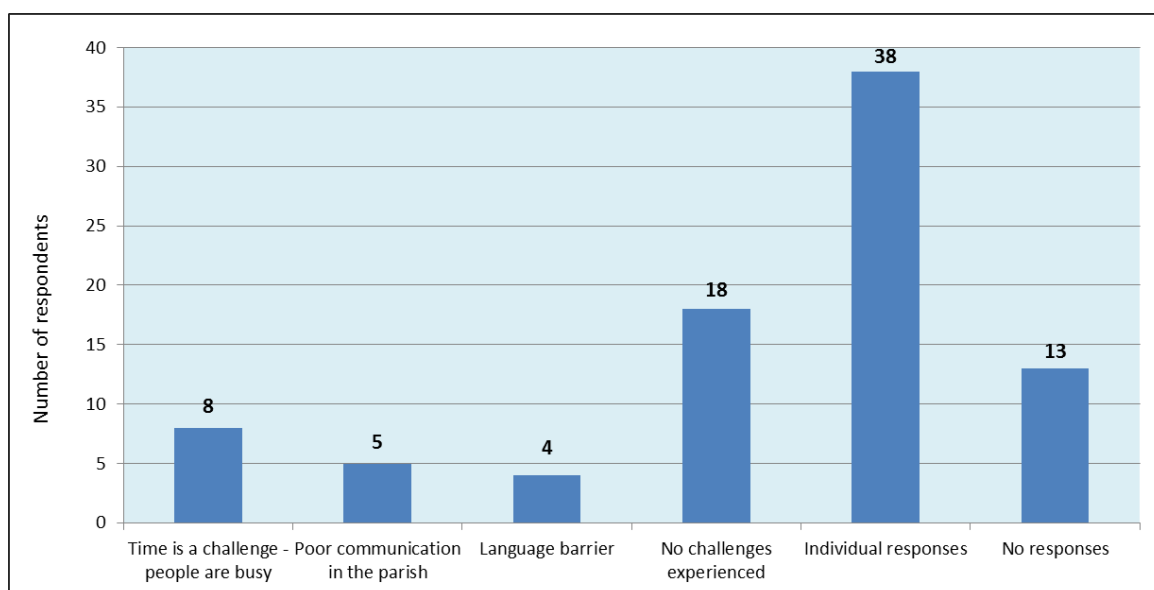
¹⁶⁰ Interview No 12

¹⁶¹ Interview No 1.

It was encouraging that only 11 respondents did not reply to this question which would seem to indicate that most of the target group had the courage to articulate their understanding of the issue. Communication, conflict and time issues surfaced as areas of concern but they are addressed in the next question.

Question 6

What kind of challenges to your ministry have you experienced?



The following comments are individual responses to this question	
Even if you are involved with young people – the church is not the place to find them – they are not there.	I was asked to step down from youth work because of complications in my marriage – I was no longer considered a good influence
Sometimes good and holy people stand in the way of building up the kingdom - they form a power mechanism – detrimental to involvement	I gave up PPC work because there was resistance to any form of change

Getting the parish into the 21 st century	Acceptance of new members
Apathy and resistance to change	Marginalisation of colleagues
Reluctance to be in the limelight	Some people deter by their attitude
Some well established parishioners objected to overhead projectors in the church and killed off a promising youth movement.	The church itself is a barrier – e.g. its stance on women, male priesthood, preoccupation with sex, power struggle in the hierarchy, denial of Vatican II spirit.
Reluctance to engage young people – after Confirmation if we don't use them – we lose them.	Church's reluctance to re-think priesthood.
Lack of co-ordination in the parish	Not having a Sunday evening Mass
Resistance to my leadership	I tried to join the choir – but felt unwelcome
Jealousy affects my confidence	Clarity of responsibility and leadership
Could we have microphones that work?	Not knowing anyone
Dogmatic, critical and negative people	Age and gender imbalance in the congregation
Difficult to integrate with an existing team	Things not happening fast enough
Poor income strangles everything	A parish leader insists everything is done her way – my offer of help was turned down.
In distributing Holy Communion –	When the priest changes –

why is the priest preferred to the lay person?	everything changes – no consistency of vision.
Some people not ready to receive new faces	I feel excluded from school events because I do not have children
Hard to get people to commit	Getting involved in the unfamiliar
Some long standing parishioners are selectively blind to multi-cultural demographic facts	Changing attitude is hard - the committee names may change but the underlying 'possessiveness' is still there.
The Parish Priest is the greatest challenge – he shapes everything according to his vision but his vision may not suit everyone.	Having to adjust one's professional standards to encompass non professional groups e.g. music. Sometimes the professional presence is needed to facilitate the best outcome.

Challenges to ministry arose principally from issues relating to time, language and poor communication in the parish community ¹⁶². Some longstanding parishioners are perceived as selectively blind to multi-cultural demographic facts. Some people are not ready to receive new faces. Others saw the Church itself as a challenge because of its stance on women, male priesthood and preoccupation with a sexual morality that is increasingly ignored. There was a criticism of good and holy people who stand in the way of building up the Kingdom by forming a power mechanism which is detrimental to involvement. Curiosity is expressed by one respondent as to why a priest has superiority over an extraordinary minister in distributing Holy Communion.

For another respondent the parish priest was perceived as the greatest challenge because he shapes everything according to his vision, but his vision

¹⁶² Interview No 8

may not suit everyone. Further clarification of this view came across from the interview where the priest was perceived to be an obstacle to the development of the community because of his 'traditional power image, right wing views and absence of people skills'¹⁶³. The dilemma was made worse by the fact that this person was 'sent in' because he was ordained and not because he was the right person for the place. There seems to be a total absence of forward planning at Diocesan level when considering the compatibility of priest and parish. The interviewee acknowledged, however, that the choice was severely limited because of the personnel currently available for deployment. It would seem there are a number of clergy available for parishes but the people they are sent to serve do not share the same view or understanding of ministry. A further source of tension is generated when priests are changed and the 'new' priest has a completely different style of ministry from the priest he succeeds. Disappointed parishioners tend to vote with their feet ¹⁶⁴.

The 'power' of the clergy surfaced as an issue in a number of the interviews. Interviewees had different experiences, but the way 'power' was exercised or abused left a deep impression. Sometimes, in the view of the interviewee, power was used as a façade for insecurity. Sometimes it was triggered by a perceived threat that perhaps the lay person had more competence than the priest.

A response from a person involved in youth leadership made it clear that if you are involved with young people, 'the Church is not the place to find them because they are not there'¹⁶⁵. Implementing a change of attitude or mind-set was perceived as very hard work given the longstanding traditions and customs of an inherited church.

Another interview revealed an acute disappointment with how the Church impacts on life today. The challenge to ministry was described in the following terms: :

'I think, obviously one of the big things is the authenticity of the church in terms of, you know life has changed, and where you are talking about the role of women, and you know.....I hate to say it, but the church is a laughing stock for thinking people, you know it really is.....people say

¹⁶³ Interview No 1

¹⁶⁴ Interview No 8

¹⁶⁵ Interview No 3

well why do you stay in it?, because it provides some sort of energy and spiritual fulfillment for you, but in terms of what it stands for.....it's just lost all credibility, and not just only about the women's issues, I mean, with all the things going on in the States at the moment, if you're a thinking Catholic and you read the press, people just can't believe what's happening to the women and all that, and of course everything that has happened in Ireland, but in England as well. It's just lost credibility, going backwards to a kind of a golden era, Gregorian chants in Masses, you know, if they think that's going to bring back people into the church.....but on the other hand I recognize that there is a place for that and with people who want that. I don't want to be an exclusive church, it's an inclusive church we need. But unless you form people and give them training and, I hate to say it, paid salaries, you look at the church in America, the evangelical church, you know, people themselves contribute towards making it work and I think parishioners have to contribute to the salaries and or the running of the church if you are going to have paid people to work, because I think especially in today's authority, people can't just give their time day after day or week after week without being paid. I think it needs to be a mixed model really¹⁶⁶.

The theological ideal wrapped up in inspirational phraseology does not always connect with those who are at the coal-face of life and ministry. For this particular interviewee the Church is out of touch with the people and in rapid decline.

The issue of diversity is clearly at the heart of the Church in South London. The response to this question illustrates a struggle to understand the mechanics of ministry, the roles of ministers and further highlights the need for formation. The question also reveals an awareness that if quality is to be achieved, attention must be given to paid ministry, particularly in specialised areas such as formation and the on-going professional development of all ministry. This must also include the issue of accountability.

An interesting challenge came from the responses to the questionnaire that 'the committee names may change but the underlying "possessiveness" is still there'¹⁶⁷. This may well be a reference to the traditional structures of the parish where the transition of personnel makes no significant difference to the overall trajectory of the community. The parish seems to be governed by a permanent type of ministry which seems to be set in traditional stone.

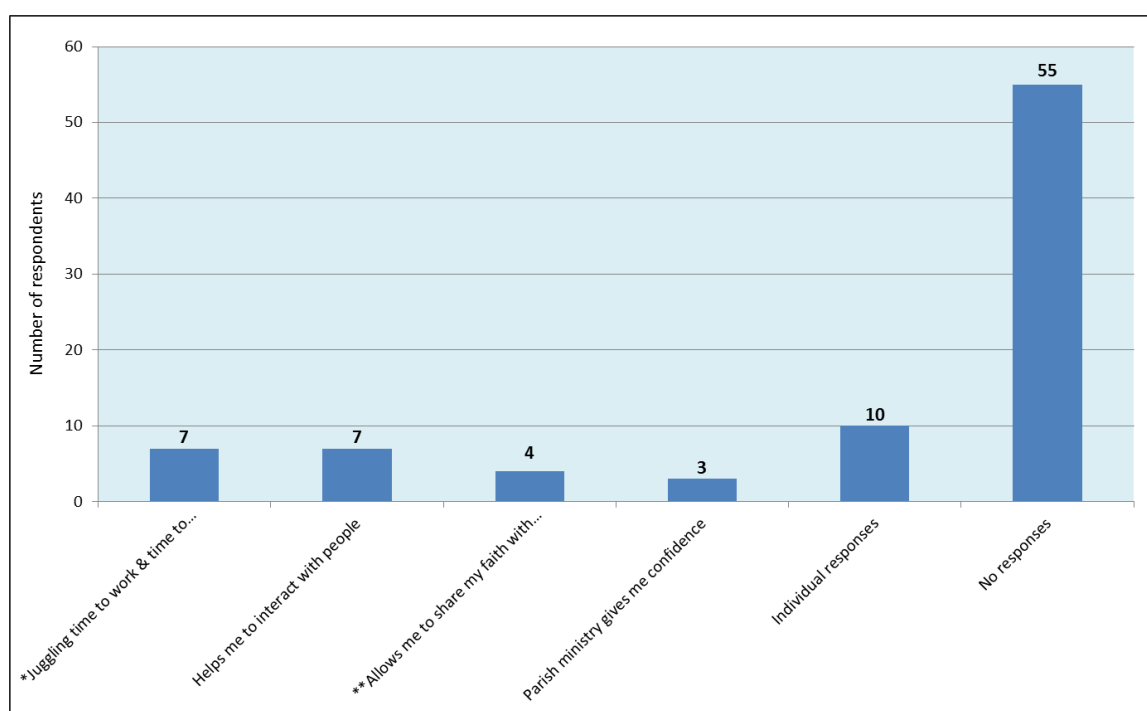
¹⁶⁶ Interview No 2.

¹⁶⁷ Questionnaire Question 6

From the questionnaire, 18 respondents experienced no challenge at all. This could reflect the fact that some people are content to comply with the status quo and exercise their ministry as a purely spiritual endeavour. However, the interviews revealed a much livelier and more informed awareness of the challenges experienced, although there was a certain helplessness expressed as to what to do when the rules of pastoral engagement were so restrictive. There were 13 respondents who did not reply to this question. Perhaps they did not want to articulate their feelings or the idea of challenge was alien to their experience.

Question 7a

To what extent, if any, does your ministry influence your work life?



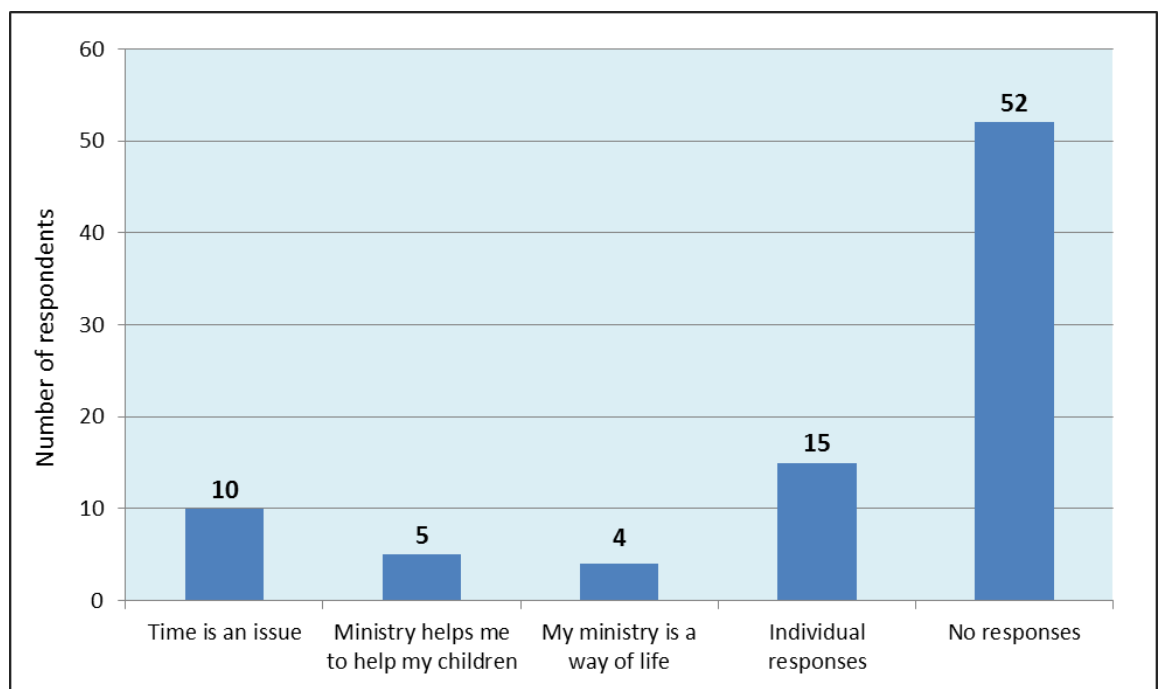
*Juggling time to work & time to parish creates tension

**Allows me to share my faith with colleagues

The following comments are individual responses to this question	
RCIA gives me opportunity to think / reflect outside of Sunday	My work prevents me from coming to church
Practice is a joy and a privilege	Helps me to resolve conflict at work
Helps me to appreciate people who are ill	Helps me to respect people
Greater awareness of peoples' needs	You need to be clear about why faith is important to you
My spiritual life and work combine	Ministry gives me strength

Question 7b

To what extent, if any, does your ministry influence your family life?



The following comments are individual responses to this question	
My children are lukewarm – I pray for a change of attitude	How do I explain a woman's place in the church to my daughters?
My grown up family respect what I do in church but show no inclination to follow me	How do I explain equality and gospel values to my family when the church seems concerned with power building?
We attend Mass as a family and then go to lunch afterwards	All my children are lapsed but I still talk about what I do in church – to remind them.
Church challenges me to live the gospel at home	My children do not like the public aspect of my ministry
Ministry gives me prayer and patience	My ministry makes me a witness to family and friends
My ministry is an integral part of my life	
Parish involvement helps my family to think more of others	My ministry brings Christ to the centre of my family
My ministry has no effect on the family	Whole family involved in music – so it is a bonding exercise for us

There is a dominance in both question 7a and 7b of no responses and it seems to apply equally to both home and work. The respondents who omitted this question either do not see how their ministry affects their home or work or they view their ministry as being entirely separate from home and work. It could also be that they skipped the question, as they are at the half-way mark of the questionnaire, and the question does require some thought and analysis. Much depends on how deeply committed they are to any specific ministry.

From the responses received however, there is a definite tension and clash of priority for some respondents in making time for family and time for parish commitments. While the questionnaire respondents seemed keen to avoid this question, the dilemma was more clearly expressed in the interviews where some people felt trapped in their parish commitments as there were no clear terms of reference and no end in sight. It was generally felt that it would be easier to commit to parish responsibility if you were free to say 'yes to a year rather than yes to forever'. The point was well made that clergy need to understand this fact if they are to get the best response from volunteers in the community.

However, the prospect of securing a new team of catechists on an annual basis would send shock waves through the ranks of clergy, not to mention experienced lead catechists, who rely on the goodwill, experience and generosity of time from all those involved in parish life. If a new team had to be located each year, the delivery of competent catechesis itself would be in serious doubt. Catechesis depends on experienced people handing on the faith to the next generation. Some catechists are highly successful because of their long years of practical experience. Perhaps a better strategy would be the formation of a catechist succession policy so that the experiential element is not lost in the transition. The interviews suggest that a single talented catechist was frequently left to 'deliver the goods' and no thought given to her/his succession. Then if the catechist moved house, became ill or died, it was a case of helpless panic and crisis management.

A further suggestion arising from the interviews was the possibility of forming a rotation of ministry where someone who is a reader for example would 'retire' from that ministry and consider another area of parish life. This in turn would create space and opportunity for a new person to be introduced. The idea of 'hogging ministry' to the exclusion of new arrivals was perceived as an obstacle in need of sensitive but clear attention.

The secular world was also flagged up by one of the interviews, where the competition emerging from the business world, the mass media and other distractions may be in conflict with the goals of the parish. The interviewee saw this as having a negative and sometimes provocative effect on his spiritual life:

‘there are so many things happening outside the parish. Things which grab people’s attention. I mean the obvious one would be, for example television and mass media. Parish life requires time, it requires commitment, it requires the opportunity and you need to make the effort’¹⁶⁸.

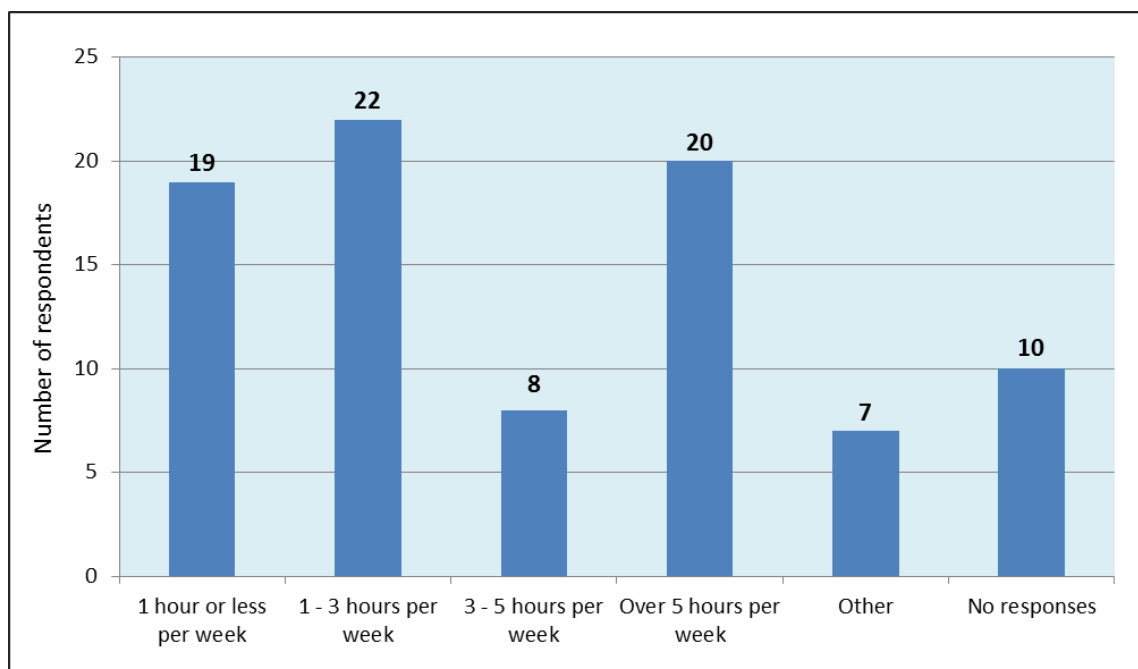
This question of how ministry affected home and work demonstrated a variety of opinions. For some people their ministry complemented their home life and work life. Where the whole family was involved and committed, there was a shared spiritual experience. For others there was conflict and tension generated by their ministry clashing with home commitments. There is also evidence of a generational tension where parents are actively involved in the local church but their children show no intention of following in their footsteps.

Question 7 produced a significant level of silence. On reflection, this is an ‘attitude question’ which seeks to understand how the respondent feels about the impact of their parish ministry on their home and work life. This question presumed that the respondents had taken the time to reflect on their particular ministry and had come to some definitive conclusions about how their commitment to ministry affected their home and work life.

¹⁶⁸ Interview No 2

Question 8

How much of your time (hours per week) do you dedicate to your parish?



As the questionnaire was sent to a targeted audience, the time commitment is varied but extensive. The time issue was articulated in the last question, and for some of the respondents the balance of time between family and church can sometimes generate a flashpoint. The scope and pace of change, the unexpected emergency and the stress of life itself, consume time. However, the generosity of time given to the community is impressive, and the commitment of the ministers to their various parishes demonstrates a witness factor that has quality and significance

Most of the regular Sunday worshippers are probably not aware of the amount of time that is given to their parish community in order to sustain the various events that are running. There are some people who will just turn up on Sunday for the Church service having no idea of the background planning or time commitment involved in its delivery. The fact that 10 people did not respond to this question may well be indicative of a total absence of, or indifference to time appreciation among some parishioners.

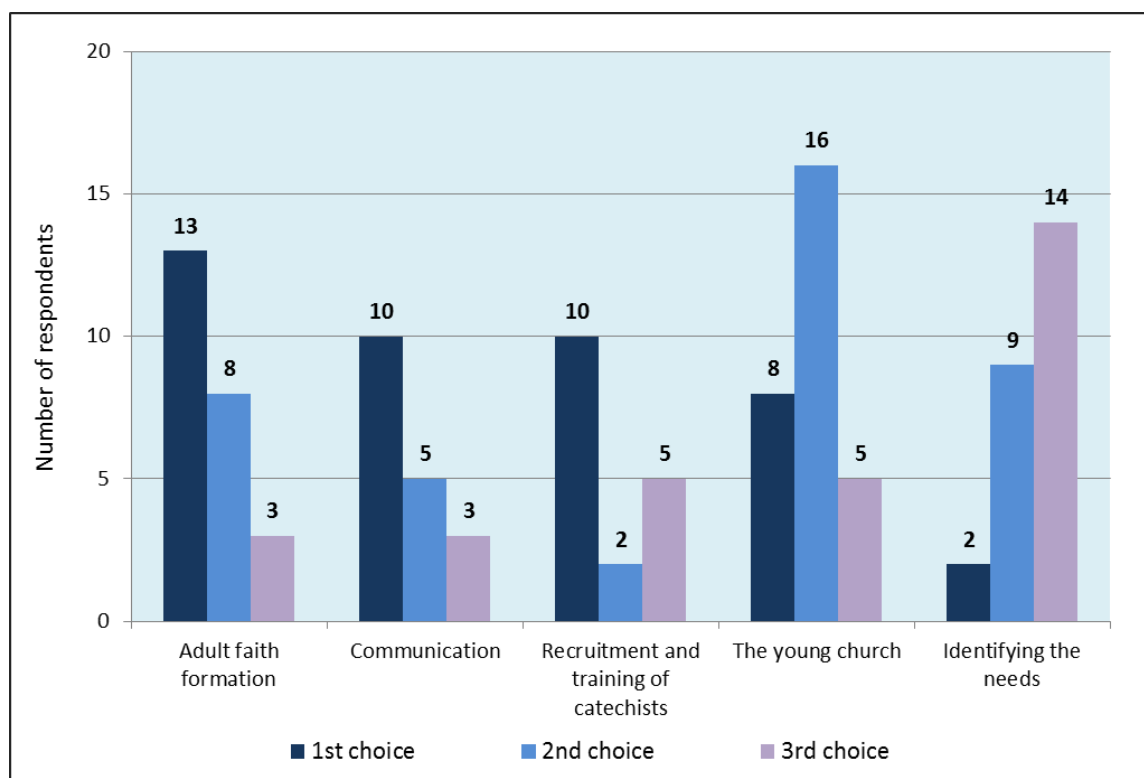
The interviews indicate that substantial time is given to the planning of actual parish programmes e.g. First Communion, Confirmation RCIA, youth work and liturgy. Catechists, youth leaders and music personnel know that particular

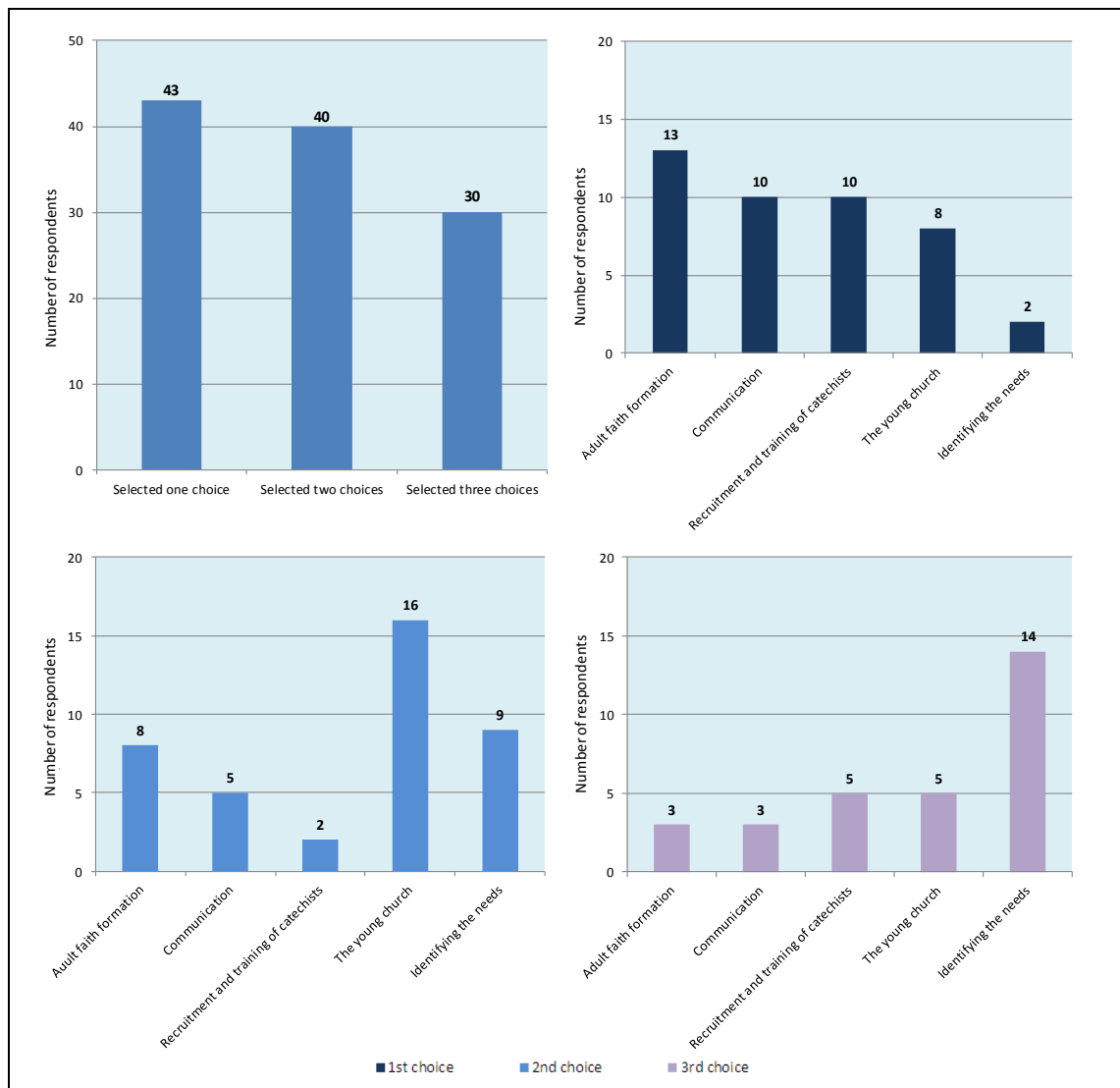
sessions depend on their forward planning and the detail takes time. While the world of technology facilitates communication, it also adds to the level of expectation. In some cases fatigue was expressed with having to run the same programme year after year, but there is an awareness also that each year, the target audience is different and requires genuine time rather than routine attention.

Question 9

What, in your experience, are the greatest challenges in your parish today?

Choose 3 and put them in order of parish priority:





Segmentation of responses to question 9

While the questionnaire produced five major challenges in parish life, each one presents a significant pastoral project in itself. The five themes outlined above are not new but they are clearly foundational to any pastoral strategy being considered for development. Individually they all relate to people who are struggling to find meaning and acceptance in the parish community. Collectively, they cover a wide range of pastoral activity and engagement. They are also a reminder of what the individual parish is expected to address with some competence and expertise.

The interviews, however, added some additional viewpoints. The greatest challenge according to one interviewee is the structure of the Catholic Church itself which is perceived as an inherited hindrance. The problem with the inherited Church is that all the 'baggage' of history and inheritance tends to

permeate through to parish level. The level of anger and frustration is evident from one interviewee:

‘The greatest challenge is overcoming the structures, which I think is impossible at the moment. I think the whole structure of the Catholic Church is geared towards dysfunction. The patriarchal system and the hierarchical systems are destructive of everybody. They are not good systems. In the parish the absolute power of the parish priest is the biggest obstacle to the mission of the church. And the bishops what they don’t do and the reason why they don’t do it..... is because they are being picked for this very reason that they won’t do it..... They don’t defend their flock in the way that they should.’¹⁶⁹

A further view was expressed by another interviewee with extensive experience in Catholic education, that there is ‘no Ofsted equivalent of supervision or pastoral appraisal operational at parish level’¹⁷⁰. The parish is run by the parish priest, who may or may not have a Parish Pastoral Council or Parish Forum around him. Parish policy is effectively dictated by the priest and there is little evidence of accountability in relation to any parish procedure. The result is that prescribed practices, rites and rituals are usually addressed out of obligation or routine but other areas of pastoral life can be neglected or ignored, either by accident or design. In the absence of any accountability procedure, ‘people will shop around for a more inclusive image of church’¹⁷¹, and it may not necessarily be a Catholic one.

One interviewee expressed some frustration about parish challenges:

‘There are families who are separated and perhaps divorced or they are single parent families who want to be involved in church but feel almost embarrassed or worried that they might not be accepted because of their situation. For me it is making sure that everyone is included and providing opportunities for them to be able to join into certain things rather than just seeing them when it’s Holy Communion or secondary schools. That’s when parents come out of the woodwork, whether they be divorced or separated or in a different circumstance to the norm.

‘For me, I think the other thing is, again coming from an educational background, you have people who can check up on what you are doing, so we have OFSTED at schools, but there is no real presence in the parish that can come in and question the parish priest or the Catechists and hold them to account or ask “well why are you doing that Holy Communion programme when your children don’t come from that background?”. In our community we have quite a diverse range, there

¹⁶⁹ Interview No 1

¹⁷⁰ Interview No 11

¹⁷¹ Interview No 11

are lots of multicultural backgrounds, does every parish cater for every ethnicity or every language group?. We have Phillippino families, Tamil families, do they get the same experience as if they were to do it say in a Polish church or wherever it might be and for me I think it's becoming, the greatest challenge is being able to get into contact with those different groups, so the separated, divorced and single parent families, that are hard to reach, and also making sure that people are held to account so that you can actually question, and I'm not sure how that would work in a church, whether it be the parish members themselves, or parish council or whatever it might be that hold people to account, but I'm sure it would be possible, and just making sure that all groups feel included'¹⁷².

The young Church was highlighted both in questionnaire and interview as a prime issue for consideration in any form of pastoral planning. One interviewee made the point that the only encounter that some young people have with the Church after First Communion and Confirmation is a parish youth club, if it exists. That particular contact may just be for a couple of hours on a Friday evening and 'then you have nothing for the next seven days'¹⁷³. A couple of the parishes in the area have paid youth workers providing some level of formational expertise, but the others are left to a handful of volunteers who struggle with family, work and time. One possible way forward was for the whole Deanery to consider the financial implications of sharing a youth worker who would have the time, training and motivation for quality youth work provision.

One interviewee expressed a great challenge and difficulty in coming to terms with The Catechism of the Church, where it describes homosexuality as objectively disordered¹⁷⁴, homosexual acts as 'acts of grave depravity, intrinsically disordered and contrary to the Natural Law'¹⁷⁵. The Catechism goes on to say that such people must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity ¹⁷⁶ but the impression of isolation experienced by some people as a result of this 'official line' is a serious cause for concern.

The fact that the Catechism based its statements on the scriptures had little real consolation for this particular interviewee who felt that the harshness of the

¹⁷² Interview 11

¹⁷³ Interview No 3

¹⁷⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church, Geoffrey Chapman, London 1994, # 2357.

¹⁷⁵ CCC # 2357.

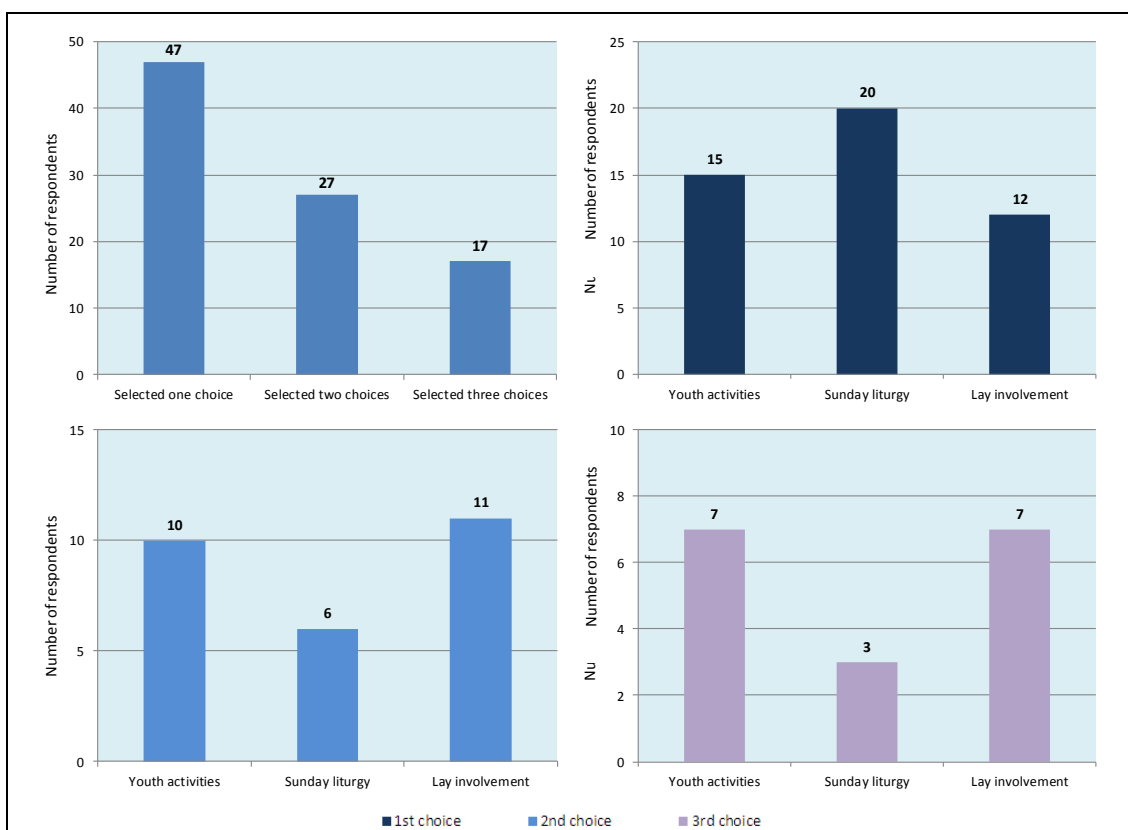
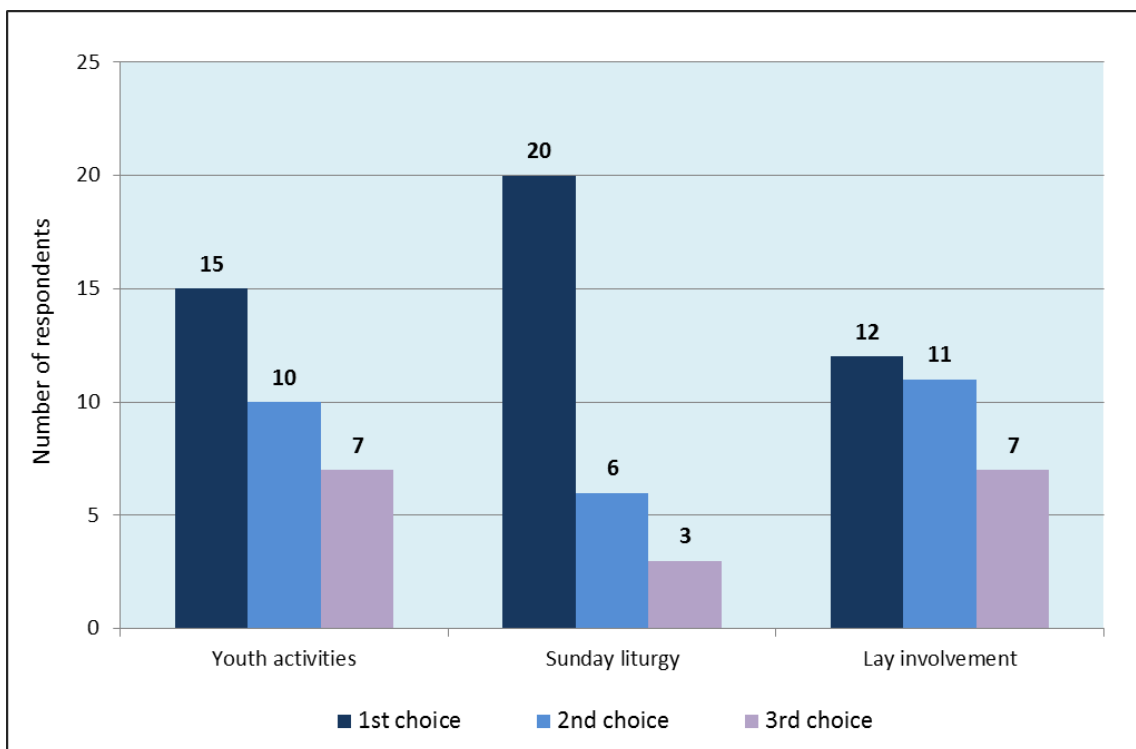
¹⁷⁶ CCC #2358.

language coming from the 'official church' served to demonstrate an alarming insensitivity towards some people who seem to be ostracised because of their orientation in life. This interviewee could not reconcile why the scriptures indicate we are all made in God's image but the Catholic Church gives the impression that if you have certain innate characteristics, you are 'intrinsically disordered'.

Question 10

Which parish ministries should receive priority?

Choose 3 and put them in order of parish priority:



Segmentation of responses to question 10

In both questionnaire and interview, the Sunday Liturgy received a significant amount of attention as a priority area of pastoral life. It was highlighted as *the* moment of contact and encounter with the people who are present for its celebration. 'The collective act of worship is a public statement'¹⁷⁷. One interviewee remarked how difficult it is to determine a priority area because so many factors are 'interdependent on each other'¹⁷⁸. The Sunday liturgy, catechesis, youth leadership, communication, awareness and identifying the needs are all links in a chain. However, catechesis and formation are foundational because these help people to see how the whole jigsaw fits together.

Many of the interviews noted the Sunday Mass as a critical moment of sacred and social contact which deserved the very best resources. People are drawn to Sunday Mass for a variety of reasons and come with a variety of needs. The multiplicity of culture, custom, language and generation, all compete for a place on the priority list. Because the liturgical rites are so predictable, sometimes the homily is the only moment remembered. One of the interviewees remarked:

'The language of the Mass is so alien to the majority of people I would say. I think the opportunity for when the priest speaks in the homily is crucial really and how they reach out to people and how they touch people's lives, because for a lot of people that is the only part of the Mass, not being disrespectful, but that's the only part of the Mass they may connect with'¹⁷⁹.

The flaw in the Sunday Eucharist is the absence of effective communication with young people. One interviewee expressed their disappointment that more effort isn't made to attract the imagination of young people who are searching for the sacred. When young people experience a liturgy that is exciting and inspiring, the impact is tangible, as one interviewee involved with youth ministry remarked:

Recently we took a group of young people to the Flame Congress¹⁸⁰, it was a hugely impressive event and the immediate question on the lips of the young people is why can't our church be like that? The answer of course is resources. But where you make the services more vibrant and

¹⁷⁷ Interview No 2

¹⁷⁸ Interview No 6

¹⁷⁹ Interview No 2

¹⁸⁰ Flame – the National Youth Congress held on 24th March 2012 at Wembley where 8000 young Catholics gathered to celebrate the continuing impact of Pope Benedict's pastoral visit to Britain in 2010.

participative the young people remember the experience. If there was an opportunity to dramatise things within the Mass then they would do, but it would take a lot of encouragement for them to do it, whereas if you had a group of young people that are really good around music and singing, they would do that. We need to start learning from other churches around the methods that everyone using different mediums like IT. It is not everyone's cup of tea and I suppose that is the challenge, how do you deal with older members of the community, and I suppose maybe what we need to have is different services and different liturgies to attract different people at different times' ¹⁸¹.

The interviews also drew attention to communication as a top parish priority because of the number of people involved in any parish. One person interviewed was very concerned about parish communications and the need for the parish to keep up to date with technology. To rely solely on a weekly newsletter reflects poor pastoral planning as many newsletters are badly produced and fail to connect with their intended audience.

The challenge of faith communication in regard to the young Church is acute as one interviewee remarked:

'Young people today are bombarded with choices, but they are bombarded with marketing every day, every minute of the day, 80% of facebook users have checked their social network by 10 o'clock in the morning. So the fact of the matter is, a young person wakes up, they will be on their phone either checking their blackberry's or their facebook pages and everything else. By the time they have hit their first lesson, first morning break at school, they have seen what is going on and they know what is happening. We have baptism, then the next time we do any formation is First Holy Communion and reconciliation, and the next time we talk to young people properly about their faith is Confirmation which is sort of 8 years later or 5 years later or whatever. The gaps in between is what we are missing, and to me, we need to have programs in between to enable them to explore their faith at a different level, and it needs to be attractive and it needs to be engaging' ¹⁸².

So when it comes to choosing parish priorities there seems to be a package of issues that require attention. Filling the gaps between Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation presents a real practical task that requires skilled human resources. In the absence of those resources, the Sunday Eucharist clearly remains an established moment of contact, communication and challenge for the whole assembly, but especially for those ministers entrusted with its planning and delivery.

¹⁸¹ Interview No 3

¹⁸² Interview No 3

One of the ordained interviewees felt it would be useful for the priest to reflect carefully on the impact of the Sunday liturgy because the possibility of drifting into an automatic Sunday morning routine is always very high:

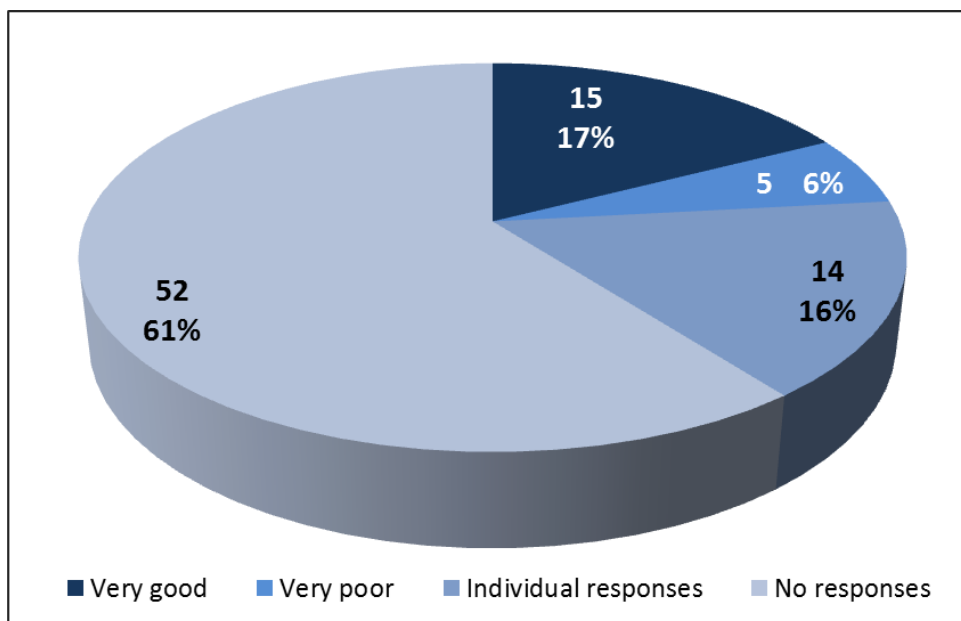
'I suppose it would be better if the priest from time to time had a view from the pew as it were because we all get a bit set in our ways and we sort of assume that everything is ok and not realise that perhaps we are getting a bit tired ourselves and maybe we, we've died and don't know, so to me the answer is, I'd agree that we don't give as much time to the liturgy as we should, and that also involves, involving other people, there is the music, there is the reading, the obvious things like that, but even down to things like making some provision for welcoming, then again, there is the role of young people and children, for example, my sister is in a parish, where she has got young children and it doesn't really seem as if the liturgy is in any way allowing for an occasional Mass where the children are invited to take a greater role, and it is very frustrating'¹⁸³.

From these comments it seems clear that priest and people need to reflect , plan and evaluate together on the services they provide and celebrate.

¹⁸³ Interview No 6

Question 11

How is your parish successful in welcoming and integrating new parishioners?



The following comments are individual responses to this question	
We have over 60 nationalities – all cherished and welcome to be involved	People are encouraged to register but then they are not followed up
Every effort is made but some people wish to remain private	Ministry of welcome needs to be developed – there are many lost opportunities
There are entry points for Baptism, parent & toddler, school, liturgy, music, young people – but others fall outside these. How do we welcome them?	The priest tries but most of the congregation are isolated in their own ethnic community concerns.

The numbers are there but the integration is missing.	Does the newcomer want to be integrated?
We need more information on what's going on.	Successful at saying 'hello' at the door – but little happens after that.
Parishioners are aware of the individual's responsibility to welcome. It's not just the priest's job.	There is a welcome corner in the church where newcomers know they can find essential information. But it is all in English!
We have a welcome party every year for new comers.	The priest needs to encourage involvement constantly.

It is worth noting that 52 respondents did not reply to this question and this may simply indicate that they are not involved in the ministry of welcome or seem not to appreciate the strategic importance of such a ministry at all. Given the multi-ethnic nature of the 5 parishes involved in the study, this particular statistic is disturbing as it comes from a targeted group of key people who should be in a position to appreciate the pastoral necessity of an effective welcome strategy.

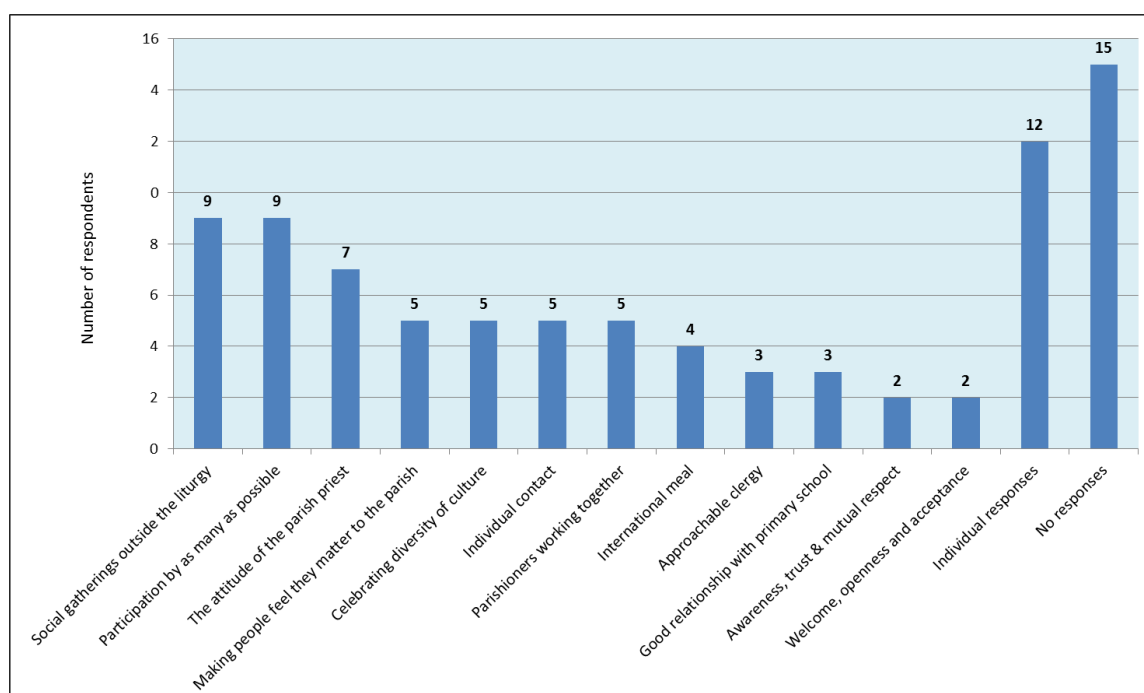
Those who did respond expressed the view that some people are content to worship in a parish community and do not necessarily wish to be drawn into the mechanics of management, maintenance or mission. There was an acknowledgement too of the difficulty of integration with so many aspects of ethnic culture and custom. The entry points of baptism, parent & toddlers, school, liturgy and young people were seen as positive moments of engagement. However, if someone should fall outside these categories, they may well remain isolated on the margins of the community.

While welcome, integration and cohesion are important elements of parish life there are those who may wish to come to church and seek out a sacred space for their own spiritual reasons. Perhaps the emphasis should be on welcome without the perceived danger of being trapped into some kind of community action.

The interviews drew attention to the time element involved in parish life. The suggestion was made that people can be welcomed and shown what the parish has to offer while making it clear that the new arrival has the choice, without feeling guilty, of when to make the commitment to a particular sphere of activity.

Question 12

What do you think helps build community in a parish?



The following comments are individual responses to this question	
Communication – all forms	Kindness, friendliness and compassion
Parish groups to reflect the ethnic diversity	PPC networking parish groups
Annual welcome party for newcomers	Small groups – so people know they belong

Cups of tea and talking with one another	Tolerance
A willingness to co-operate	Engaging the talents of other people
A good parish team	People being prepared to get out of their comfort zone

The response to this question identifies the need for opportunities outside the liturgy for people to come together as Church. Pastoral invitations and positive attitudes become significant foundation stones to building community. Awareness, welcome, approachability and communication are clearly highlighted as essential components and building blocks not just of development but of belonging. One of the interviewees indicated that 'if we feel we belong, then we are more likely to commit our time'¹⁸⁴.

At the heart of all these comments, however, there is evidence of a living faith yearning to be owned, articulated and celebrated. The response to this question shows evidence of a clear awareness of all the various parish fragments that compose the larger pastoral canvas. There is evidence also of the steps to be taken to bring the canvas to life.

It is worth noting that all the responses from the questionnaire were positive with the exception of those referring to the attitude of the parish priest. When clerical attitude is negative, the response from the people is correspondingly negative. One respondent observed that community-building moves on when people are willing to get out of their comfort zone and make the effort to reach out in some way. Creatures of habit, well established parishioners have settled down in the community and can resist change if it seems to disturb the status quo.

The interviews noted that a parish can have different congregations at different Masses, and effectively, they never meet. One parish can have numerous groups at different celebrations but the level of cross communication is very low. However, one interviewee was adamant that the Sunday liturgy is a key

¹⁸⁴ Interview No 2.

element in building parish community, followed closely by opportunities for formation:

'I think the liturgy has got to be key. People come along and they have to feel that they have enjoyed it. Again they have got to feel a sense of worth. They have got to be given things every now and again, whether it's an odd good retreat or some activities that actually makes people think "oh that made me think", it can be something simple, it's like, being able to hear the priest with the right speaker system. I think a sense of sociability and not just what you expect sociability to be, you know for example, there is a lot of concentration from Catholic parishes on families, but I think there is a lot of other people out there who actually also get left out and we don't need to have that, so they need to be part of that team too, whether its soup and sandwiches for the elderly. But I still think it goes back to the ethical question that you have to do something more than just that, it is not just about a club, it has to give some challenge to people which is relevant to their own life'¹⁸⁵.

Another interview indicated the absence of communication in various ethnic languages as a barrier to building community in the parish. English is spoken routinely and predominantly, and the presumption is made that everyone understands. In reality, there are many people who struggle with the English language, and some parents are dependent on their children for interpretation.

'I just think for me, language is a barrier that lots of us don't realise, but there are lots of families who are bilingual and some trilingual and their experiences of Mass and church are completely different to what we know, so perhaps opening the avenue of saying, ok let's see if we can organize the Gospel to be read in a different language today and see how that might happen, or, I don't know the likelihood of Mass being said in a different language and encouraging those groups of people to come in. I think community is something people need to work at together and it's not just the job of one person and I think everyone needs to buy into it because without that, you don't really have community'¹⁸⁶,

Another view expressed about building community is that parish organisations sometimes work against community. They are sometimes perceived as closed shops: 'We should get rid of same sex groups. Organisations divide community. They work against inclusivity. They result in people being excluded and left out'¹⁸⁷. Such a view articulates the fact that some people are drawn to the parish for personal and private devotion and while the natural tendency is to drag them into some form of parish activity or group, in reality their desire to be left alone needs to be respected. The moment may come for their active

¹⁸⁵ Interview No 7.

¹⁸⁶ Interview No 8

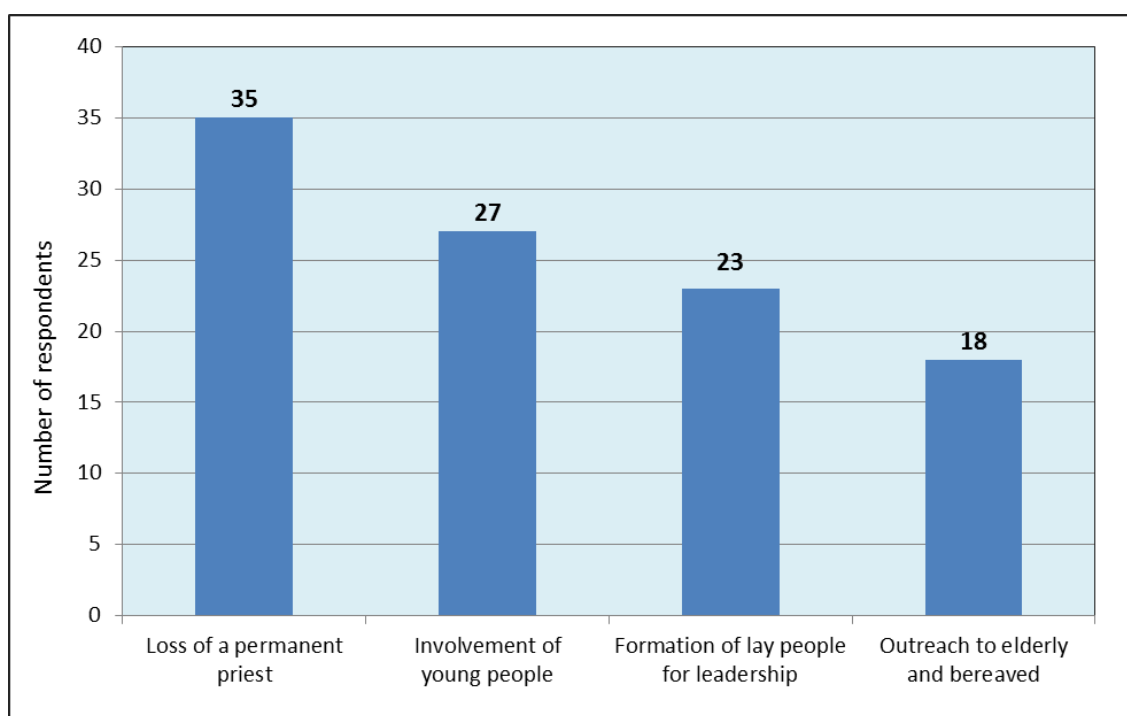
¹⁸⁷ Interview No 1

involvement but they may well need time to realise the implication of belonging to a community in South London which can be in a constant state of transition.

Question 13

What are the big concerns as you look to the future of

(a) your parish?

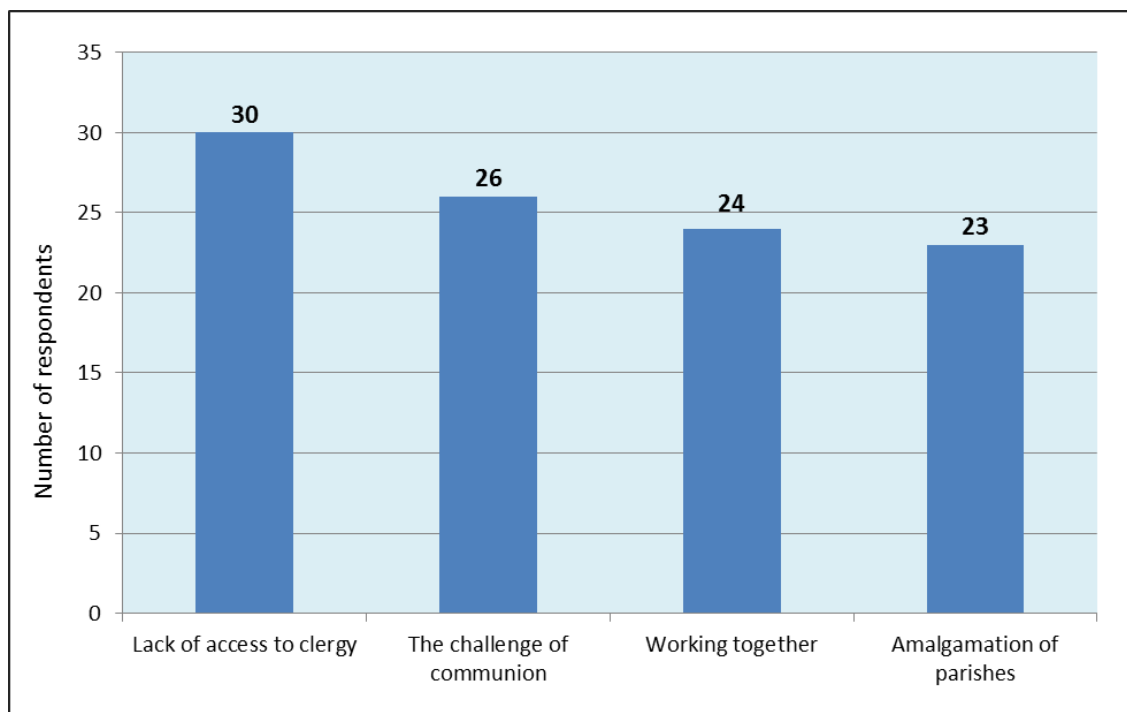


There were multiple responses to this question and a significant concern from the questionnaire about the loss of a permanent priest from the parish. With the reduction in ordained personnel, a number of parishes have been reduced from three priests to two priests or from two to one in recent years. Formation, young people and outreach are flagged up as significant areas of concern.

Question 13

What are the big concerns as you look to the future of

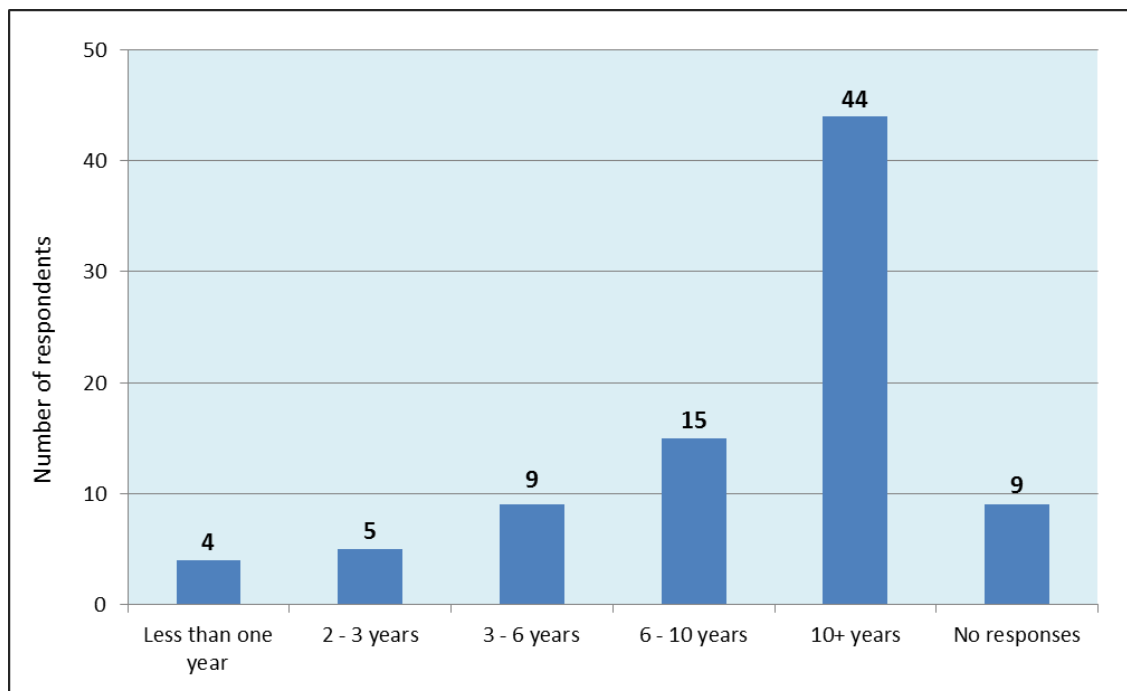
(b) your Deanery?



Here again, there were multiple responses to this question but the evidence shows that If parishes were to be amalgamated or clustered, some people would experience an acute sense of loss. For a number of people, their whole life history is identified with a particular parish community, so lack of access to familiar clergy, the challenge of communication, the prospect of working together in a bigger pastoral area would all contribute to a new challenge of understanding and pastoral practice.

Question 14

How many years have you been involved in your parish?



All the respondents clearly speak from various degrees of parish experience. There is an accumulative perspective here that adds pastoral credibility, integrity and reliability to the project. The largest number (44) reflects over 10 years of parish time and pastoral involvement. It could be argued that this group is perhaps more set in their ways, but by actually responding they bring significant wisdom to bear on the questions. Nine people did not respond to this question and that may reflect some new arrivals in their parishes or perhaps they were offering their views as non-participants in parish life.

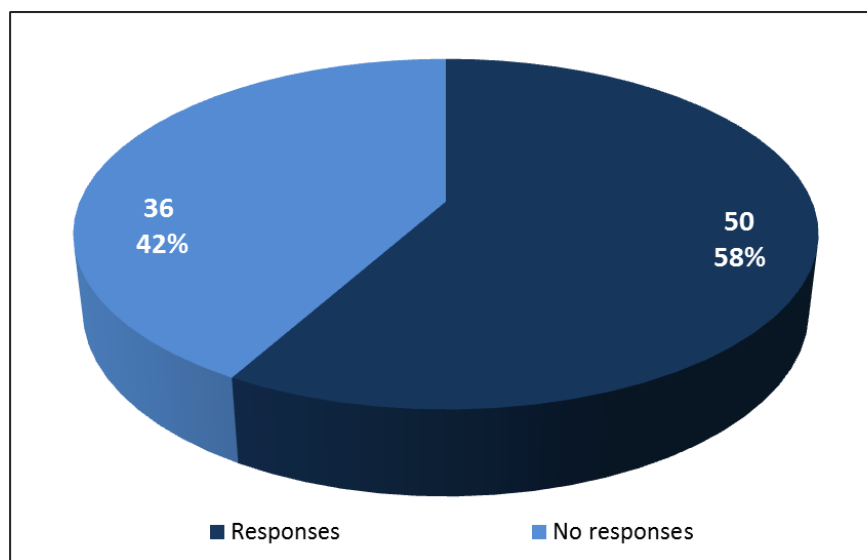
Question 15

Can you tell me a story about something that has happened to you which illustrates how you feel your gifts were valued or not valued in the parish?

Is the 'geographical' parish so important? Better to find a community that fosters welcome and belonging.	Sometimes I feel used – asked to cover when others do not show up.
A musically talented young parishioner now plays in another Christian church because he felt unappreciated in his own community.	I once experienced a friend being turned away and felt the way it was done by the priest – was unkind.
I was thanked by the priest for all I do – I felt great.	When the priest said 'thank you' I felt valued.
I do not think about how my gifts are to be used – my responsibility is to offer them – what others think of them is less important.	I wanted to be a lay minister but the priest would not agree – I felt terrible.
I was not accepted as a candidate for the permanent Diaconate – I felt dismissed.	I have marriage complications and I feel no longer wanted.
If I am invited I will respond.	I am not involved but do not feel excluded at all.
I was asked to read at Easter and was touched by the many positive comments received.	I wish my parish would look around at neighbouring parishes – just to see how things MIGHT be done. I suggest this to the PPC but the idea is routinely rejected.
I sang the psalm and was affirmed by various people. I also organised some social gatherings and was touched when some of them said I had done a great job in bringing them together.	I was thanked for all I do in the church and I felt appreciated and valued.
I stopped attending RCIA as a catechist over a year ago and have yet to be asked why!	Priest was reticent when I was elected as chair of school governors – but now he seems to accept my ability.
With the relationships I have built up over the years – I feel I have made a difference.	Receiving affirmation from those in charge is important – it provides an incentive to keep going.
I welcomed a woman to church – she came every week and then disappeared. I suppose we have to give people the option to choose differently.	When I was ill the priest came to see me – made me feel valued.

I am thankful for many friends here.	To see the look on people's faces when I give out Holy Communion – the sheer joy of serving God through his people.
When the priest heard me singing carols at the shopping centre he said I should join the choir. I was very happy to respond.	At RCIA I support those preparing for the sacraments – people appreciate the work I do –
I would like to be more involved and know I have a lot to give – but to join the Parish Council you have to wait to be nominated – and no-one really knows anybody.	I was married in this church and recently was asked to help with Confirmation – I never looked back I believe the Lord spoke through that invitation.
I have gifts to offer that are not used – it may be a personality issue.	As a recent convert to the Church I am absolutely amazed by the support and friendship from the RCIA team.
My skills in teaching were utilised to work with young people in the parish – I felt great.	While serving the sick and housebound at home or in hospital – I experience their thankfulness.
I used to read and one morning a woman said she could hear every word I said – she appreciated my reading efforts.	Being a lone guitarist – when the others are not there – some people tell me I am talented – and I appreciate that.
I donated some money to renovate the church and I felt appreciated and glad to be able to help.	I have always been supported and encouraged to take an active part in the parish.
I am not part of any ministry – but I do not feel excluded at all.	I feel I am trusted.
The encouragement, openness and honesty of my parents and the priest to 'just get involved' and I did. Your gifts and talents grow to what you never knew you had.	When the priest listens to a concern I have about someone – and acts on it – I feel useful
I was asked to share my secretarial skills and I did.	I was asked to train servers and Lay Ministers – I was glad to help.
The relationships I built up with the sick and housebound – has been the greatest affirmation.	Being included in Masses using music – I felt valued.
I received a thank you note from the priest – and it was very unexpected but good.	No story – I just feel appreciated.

Leading young people makes me feel valued	I work with people in the parish all the time – and I hope I am making a difference.
I started a special group for older people and I know it has added to their quality of life.	I don't think I can do much but the parish is OK

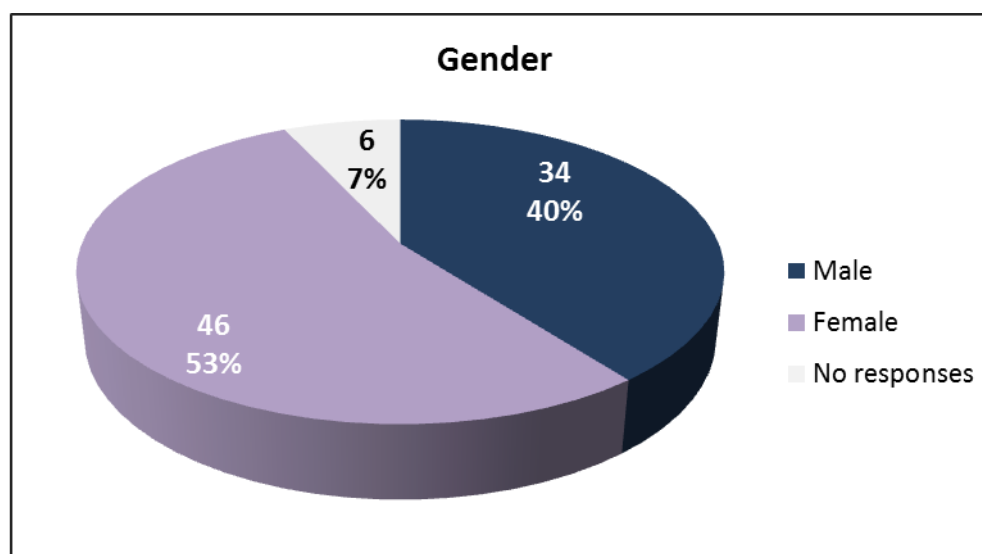
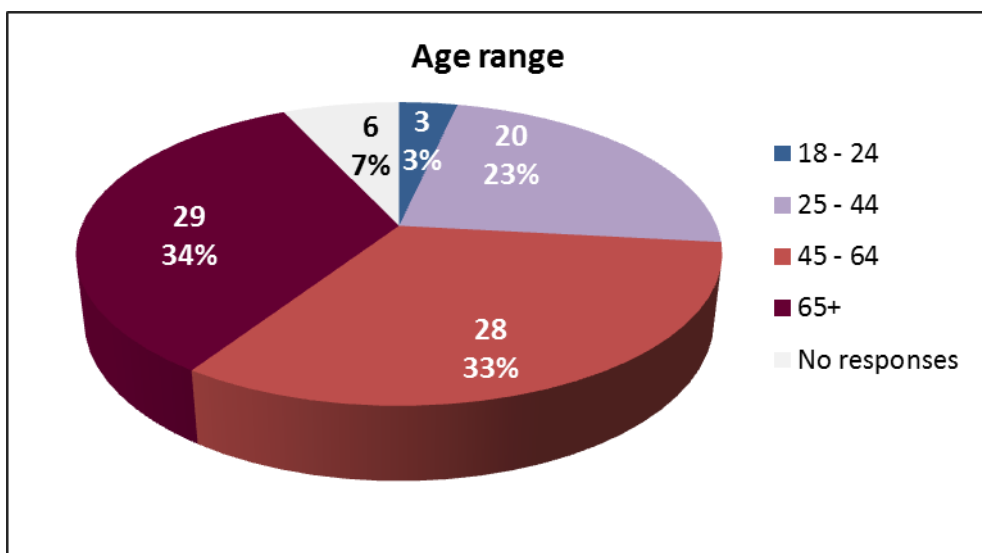


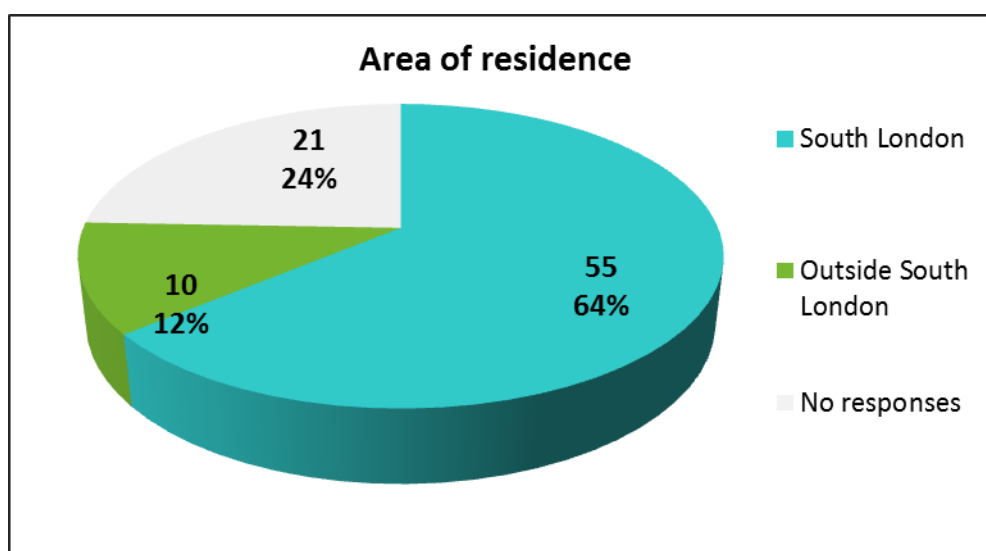
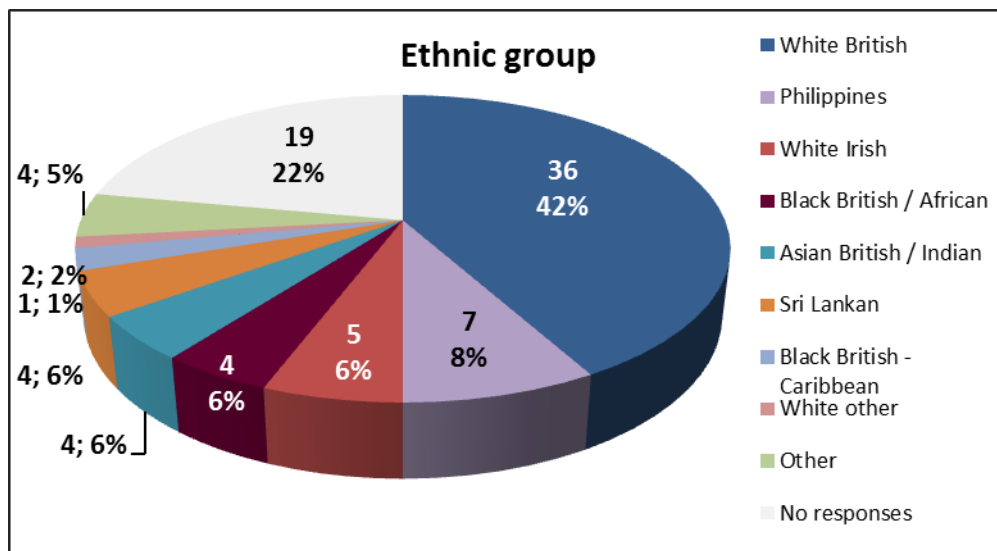
There were mixed views expressed in response to this question and 36 respondents chose to share their stories while 50 decided to remain silent. The stories illustrate the diversity of people and the diversity of experiences in parish life. The comments show how little things in parishes e.g. being asked to read, an expression of gratitude to acknowledge someone's ministry or a hospital visit, can have a significant difference and impact. There is also evidence of hurt and disappointment when someone is at the receiving end of a negative attitude or dismissive experience.

This question implied that the respondent had to delve into their parish experience and articulate incidents that were either happy or perhaps painful to relate. The challenge of the question is that it assumed experiential knowledge and the vocabulary to articulate it. The value of the question was that it provided a good opportunity for real life stories and experience to be recorded and evaluated. This question may have been skipped by some respondents because it differed in style from the others by inviting a prose narrative response.

The high number of non-responses may also indicate that for all those who are actively involved in parish ministry, only a few people manage to infiltrate into the actual infrastructure and orchestration of parish life. Some ministries may be exercised at surface level while a few people, perhaps by force of personality or charism, are more deeply embedded. The 36 stories recorded here begin to reveal a reflective involvement in community life. However, the 50 abstentions should not be dismissed as mere absent responses, as they may well provide another more challenging narrative, given the right opportunity and forum.

Question 16 - Demographics





3.6 Summary and Conclusions

In this section I have outlined the various research steps and described the methodology engaged in conducting the empirical section of this study. Using quantitative methodology, I distributed 100 questionnaires among five Roman Catholic parish communities in South London. This was primarily aimed at and distributed to people directly involved in their parish community in order to determine their understanding of ministry. Having received the questionnaire responses, I collated the data in numerical statistics and graph form where possible.

Then using qualitative methodology, I conducted twelve interviews with 10 lay and 2 ordained participants, chosen because of their practitioner status, particular leadership skills and experience of parish life. This was purposeful sampling as random sampling would be lacking in quality insight. The questions for the interviews were chosen from the questionnaire data, thus providing a further link between the two research methods.

Having transcribed all the audio recordings of the interviews, I then proceeded to write a commentary on the questionnaire and interview process. Taking each question individually, I tabulated the responses where possible and cross-referenced them with the interviews. The 16 questions from the questionnaire and the 12 interviews provided a substantial amount of material concerning a range of pastoral and practical issues. The key issues emerging from the research are: (1) The Invitation to be Involved in Parish Life and Ministry, (2) The Challenge and Pressure of Time, (3) The Sunday Liturgy, (4) Adult Faith Formation, (5) Communication, (6) Recruitment and Training of Catechists, (7) The Young Church, (8) Identifying the Needs of the Community and (9) The Intercultural Mission of the Church Today. There were also accounts of acceptance and affirmation, as well as some incidents of rejection and isolation of people in various pastoral circumstances.

In the next section, I will explore and prioritise the key findings from this empirical exercise, cross-reference these with some of the theological views outlined in part 2 and then see what pastoral implications are beginning to emerge from the process.

Chapter 4: Emergent Themes and Pastoral Implications

4.1 Overview of the project to date.

In Chapter 1 of this thesis, I outlined the reasons, aims, objectives and scope of the study. I then outlined the design methodology and presented some of the challenges involved in mapping a local theology of this nature. In Chapter 2 of the work, I explored some of the major components that form the bedrock of pastoral and practical ministry in parish life. The substantial, and sometimes controversial issues of Church, parish, charism, ministry and mission all combine in a variety of ways, to form the bedrock of the parish community. I also introduced the three main resources I would use as a theological backdrop to the project.

Chapter 3 of the study explored the actual understanding of ministry among key practitioners, providing the opportunity for participants in the study to anonymously articulate their concerns and identify any systemic obstacles that may present significant challenge in the parish itself. I provided a commentary and analysis on all 16 questions that formed the foundation of the empirical section.

The key findings emerging from the research now requires presentation, prioritisation and interpretation. This interpretation will constitute a substantial portion of this paper as it is based on grassroots knowledge, perception and understanding of ministry by experienced practitioners engaged in actual parish life. To begin this process of interpretation, I will indicate the key findings which I consider most significant in the light of my research question and within the limits of the study.

I will indicate why these findings are important and relevant to pastoral reflection and development of the local Church. Collectively these findings form a consultative base from which pastoral practice may be explored, developed and taken forward.

4.2 The Key Findings

1. The Invitation to be Involved in Parish Life and Ministry
2. The Challenge and Pressure of Time
3. The Sunday Liturgy – Source and Summit
4. Adult Faith Formation
5. Communication in the Service of the Gospel
6. Recruitment and Training of Catechists
7. The Young Church
8. Identifying the Needs of the Community
9. The Intercultural Mission of the Church Today
10. Power and Isolation

These ten themes are based on the empirical evidence derived from a combination of the questionnaire and interview analysis. I see these factors as key hinges of parish life and they deserve serious consideration by the whole parish community because individually and collectively, they impact directly on how the parish sees and fulfils its Mission in today's world. They are particularly relevant when a parish is engaged in any evaluation of current practice or future pastoral planning..

The value of these findings is that collectively they form a pastoral network of life that has its source in the Church as the people of God. Each of the ten findings illustrates the need to belong and the need to participate (question 12) in a way of life that brings people into contact with the sacred. These findings also demonstrate that when people in parishes are invited to engage in theological reflection, they have the experience, the perception and the wisdom to identify the essentials and name the priorities (question 9) that require sustained attention.

I have decided to explore these ten themes in some detail because they are essential ecclesiological factors that determine the quality of parish life. They are very relevant to anyone charged with leadership, faith development, or any kind of pastoral responsibility in parish, deanery or diocesan life. These themes are valuable signposts that constantly challenge the pastoral agenda and point the way to something greater than themselves.

4.3 Reflections on the Key Findings

4.3.1 The Invitation to be Involved in Parish Life and Ministry.

This theme is important because it received such a high response rate from the empirical exercise. Every respondent in the questionnaire described how they got involved in parish life and identified the prime sources of involvement as (1) an invitation from the priest, (2) personal initiative and (3) family influence. Many other avenues of involvement were identified but these three reflect the close integration and relationship of family and Church. The fact that every respondent actually answered this question, remembered how they got involved and sustained the involvement, is an indication of how important their work in the local Church is to them.

The invitation to be involved in parish life and ministry however, does not derive its legitimacy from the shortage of priests or concessions made by pastoral leaders. The invitation derives its legitimacy from the moment of Baptism¹⁸⁸. Everyone is called to serve the reign of God but not everyone realises the implication of the call. We saw in Chapter 2 how Thomas O'Meara took the view that the church (and its leaders) 'either calls forth ministers out of the community or it dies'¹⁸⁹. O'Meara remarks that this engagement of personnel and distribution of labour is not a threat to the priest but 'sets him free so that he is given a clearer identity'¹⁹⁰.

There are many works to be done in the Church and there are many people to do them. God is active in all of them and in different ways. O'Meara maintains that our 'gifts and charisms lead us into the life of the church and are the foundation stones for building up the community'¹⁹¹. There is, however, an inherited reluctance on the part of some clergy to delegate and empower lay people so that all the gifts and charisms are engaged and celebrated in the community.

¹⁸⁸ The Code of Canon Law, Collins 1983, #208.

¹⁸⁹ O'Meara, T.F. *Theology of Ministry*, Paulist Press, New York, 1983, p.178.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid p.197.

¹⁹¹ Ibid p.27

But from questionnaire to interview there was an overwhelming desire to involve more people in the life of the parish. The extensive range of ministries outlined in question 2 of the questionnaire presents a strong network of ecclesial engagement in the various parishes. This diversification of ministry personifies the Pauline image of the Body of Christ ¹⁹² at work in the local Church. Paul maintains that God uses all of these gifts and charisms to empower people.

We see in *Lumen Gentium* that gifts and charisms are given by the Spirit to make people 'fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church. Whether these charisms be very remarkable or more simply or widely diffused, they are to be received with thanksgiving since they are fitting and useful for the needs of the Church'¹⁹³. Responsibility is then delegated to Church authorities to actually discern the authenticity of the gifts and appropriate their potential in the service of the local Church.

But there is also a note of caution here not to stifle the gift or extinguish the Spirit but to 'test all things and hold fast to what is good'¹⁹⁴. This is a very sensitive directive and, while pastorally positive and essential, it could also be interpreted as a manipulative way to legitimise an abuse of power by clergy or indeed by clericalised lay people engaged in what can be a very controversial process of selective decision. Excluding people because their charisms may not coincide with the view of those in parish leadership positions can easily give rise to community friction, a perception of being unwanted and a closed shop mentality as evidenced in question 6; 'some people are not ready to receive new faces' and 'some people deter by their attitude'. 'A parish leader insists everything is done her way, my offer of help was turned down'. Such comments reflect what can happen.

However, while the number of people involved and active seems quite significant, it is actually just a fraction of the total Catholic attendance and

¹⁹² 1 Cor 12:4 'there is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit'. ... 1 Cor 12: 12 'Just as the human body though it is made up of many parts is a single unit, because all these parts though many make one body, so it is with Christ'.

¹⁹³ LG#12

¹⁹⁴ LG#12

population of the participating parishes. The five multi-ethnic parishes that took part in the survey have an average Mass attendance on Sunday of 5666¹⁹⁵ people. The number of parishioners actively involved in ministry would probably be about 100 per parish. The majority therefore would seem to have a devotional, almost passive presence on Sunday, while a small strategic group form the basis of, and take responsibility for, specific practical and pastoral engagement.

One of the interviewees highlighted the fact that you can ask many people to be involved in parish ministry but the invitation is sometimes necessarily shelved if not refused::

‘When you want people to be committed, it has to fit in with their lifestyle. When you ask someone to do something and they don’t do it, you feel very dejected, so it’s very hard I think for clergy, or anybody really, you have be able to learn to ask when the answer “no” is ok, so, do you want to do that?, oh ok, you don’t have to without them feeling bad or you feeling bad, and that’s a very difficult thing to do I think. There is another thing about asking. It’s not minding if they say no, but leaving the door open for a future time’.¹⁹⁶

The understanding of ministry articulated in question 5 clearly demonstrates that these respondents are very aware of the grace and privilege that comes with the opportunity to participate and serve the local Church. Comments like ‘living out my baptismal vocation’, and ‘living my faith’ indicate a fairly secure understanding of what exercising ministry means. There is real joy and a sense of the sacred in their attitude and experience. The interviewees, however were able to reflect more deeply and articulate more strongly their frustration at the absence of formation and delegation for example.

The real message here is that the opportunity for taking responsibility for pastoral ministry exists in every parish. The people of God are there. Much seems to depend on the leadership of the community having the vision, the courage and the confidence to actively engage with the people entrusted to their care.

¹⁹⁵ Archdiocese of Southwark, Catholic Directory 2012.

¹⁹⁶ Interview No 1

4.3..2 The Challenge and Pressure of Time

The time issue surfaced quite strongly in questions 6, 7a, 8 and 14 of the questionnaire. The generosity of time devoted to parish life and evidenced in the response to question 8 is impressive. As respondents recorded their own time commitment in question 14 of the questionnaire, we see that 44 of the respondents have given over 10 years of their lives to their parish communities. The time given by parish volunteers is quite impossible to quantify. Most regular parishioners would simply not be aware of the enormous amount of time dedicated to the whole parish plant.

The stewardship of time begins with a realisation that none of us owns time. Time is a total gift. Time however, has different connotations for those who participated in this project. One of the interviewees lamented the inability of clergy to be able to connect with people at a significant level of quality, especially during the time available on a Sunday morning. 'The few minutes you have at Church on a Sunday morning depends on the sound system working, it depends on the ability to hear above 20 children crying at the same time, it depends on the quality and delivery of the homily, what connects and what gets through as well as the few minutes before and after Mass'¹⁹⁷. There was a feeling expressed in this interview that everyone seems in a rush to get in and get out as fast as they can. The momentary greetings with the clergy and indeed other members of the congregation, are superficial, clinical and courteous. But for some people, this is the only time they have to give to the ecclesial gathering. For many people, it seems to be the habitual fulfilment of an inherited obligation.

Vatican II marked the transition of time in the 1960's, inviting and encouraging a very attentive Church audience to read 'the signs of the times'¹⁹⁸. The invitation was so extraordinary that the phrase has been repeatedly used by priest, lay person and politician alike. It is interesting that *Gaudium et Spes* stresses the word 'responsibility' and then adds that the real challenge is to see the world of experience through the lens (light) of the Gospel. The value of the invitation is

¹⁹⁷ Interview No 2

¹⁹⁸ *Gaudium et Spes*, #4

that it permeates through to every community,. provides an immediate pastoral agenda for discussion and then invites interpretation. If a community wishes to engage in theological reflection, there is no shortage of issues to fuel discussion. 'One of the gravest errors of our time is the dichotomy between the faith which many profess and the practice of their daily lives'¹⁹⁹. The Council fathers were well aware of the fragmentation of faith practice and the conflict of time commitment. Today's Church in South London faces the very same dilemma.

The management and allocation of time to parish life and the juggling of time with work commitments clearly generates tension and conflicting loyalties. There was an important view raised in one of the interviews as to how and where we invest our time when it comes to balancing the demands of home, school and parish life. 'In the past, people seem to have more time. Nowadays with greater pressure around the family, children are doing more, more activities are being offered by school, you have all kinds of after school clubs, children are under pressure to achieve more, so unless the Church can come up with something of similar or better quality, the Church loses out. There is real competition out there for your time'²⁰⁰.

When children are drawn towards something that attracts them, parents too are also drawn in the same direction. This also affects and dictates the amount of time parents themselves can give to parish work. Another interviewee however, drew attention to commitment. 'If you are committed to something you will find the time to do it'²⁰¹. It seems to suggest that if people are committed to the faith, the Church, the parish and the challenge they carry, then that becomes the time priority and everything else falls into second place. While this calibre of commitment is exemplary and inspirational, it is a fairly rare commodity in my experience.

This does however reflect a view by David Heywood that people are always willing to respond to something worthwhile in life. According to Heywood 'we need a strong and attractive vision of what the Kingdom of God might mean for

¹⁹⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, #43

²⁰⁰ Interview No 6

²⁰¹ Interview No 2

our contemporary culture'²⁰². This implies that the Church needs to find the time and the commitment to engage in dialogue with contemporary culture, a dialogue that is not optional, according to the authors of *On the Way to Life*²⁰³. Finding the time, and the opportunity for such an exchange, is part of the continuing process of the Church's life.

From the clergy point of view, the diocese does its best through on-going formation to create the time and the opportunity to come away from parish life and experience reflection on the bigger pastoral landscape. However, lay people do not experience the same level of time-reflection opportunity. One of the interviewees pointed out that even if the opportunity was created, it would still be a struggle to find the time when your job and your family occupy centre ground in your life.

Much time and attention is given to organising, advertising and promoting one-off big events like the Flame Conference in Wembley Stadium for young people. However, one of the interviewees involved with young people asked if more consideration could be given to investing more time in smaller and more intimate gatherings either at parish or deanery level. The point was that the big events are great but 'they raise unrealistic expectations which simply cannot be matched at local parish level'²⁰⁴. The level of disappointment among young people is inevitable and simply highlights the fact that regular parish communities cannot really compete with the level of engagement or impact that these big events deliver. The challenge to the parish, and the local Deanery, is to find the personnel who have the time, and the requisite skill, to create smaller but effective events that deliver quality material at local level.

The other aspect of time, articulated especially in the interviews, is that people who contribute and share substantial time within their parish communities need to be acknowledged and appreciated for the work they do. While such acknowledgement would not be expected or sought by those involved, nevertheless the moment of recognition and affirmation needs to find its way on to the parish agenda. It is good pastoral practice, good example and a good

²⁰² Heywood, p.67

²⁰³ *On the Way to Life*, Catholic Education Service, 2005, p.69

²⁰⁴ Interview No 6

exercise in human relations to ensure that the moment is created to say; 'thank you for the time'.

Parishes are full of volunteer people who devote substantial time to their local Church. Their ministry may be among the 'humble and hidden services'²⁰⁵ referred to by Pope Francis but they deserve some quality time of formation, appreciation and affirmation in their work for the Church.

4.3.3. The Sunday Liturgy – Source and Summit

The Sunday liturgy emerged in the questionnaire and interview process as an absolutely key moment for parish celebration and a crucial opportunity for lay involvement and participation. Question 10 highlighted the Sunday Liturgy as a prime area of pastoral concern and priority. Question 13 flagged up the loss of a permanent priest as a significant loss to the community as it may well result in merger with a neighbouring parish and eventually experiencing a priest-less parish. The consequential impact of merger or amalgamation could well result in a reduction of the Sunday Eucharist provision.

The Sunday Mass is the one moment in the week when the whole people of God in the community are drawn together. The parish needs to make the most of this moment and engage the best resources available. The presence of so many nationalities provides a gift and a challenge. The variety of cultures is a huge opportunity for inclusion, social cohesion and a manifestation of mission.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy was the first document to be issued from Vatican II and puts on record that 'the full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else, for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian Spirit'²⁰⁶. Again, the Council is quite explicit in its direction and guidance as to the importance attached to the liturgy. The emphasis placed on all the people participating is quite a challenge to any parish community. But the intention is clearly stated that the liturgy should embrace the entire people of God in that place. The practical implication of that directive and the empowerment of

²⁰⁵ *Evangelii Gaudium*, #76

²⁰⁶ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, #14

ministry in that community, falls to the responsibility of the parish and those entrusted with its care.

Thomas O'Meara holds the view that the explosion of ministry emerging after Vatican II simply suggests that 'the Holy Spirit is intent upon a wider service, a more diverse ministry for Church life'²⁰⁷. O'Meara observes that the Church lives in history and consequently its liturgy and means of communication will change, grow, adapt and be renewed in every generation. He acknowledges however, that sometimes change is slow and real practice sometimes precedes official Church announcements.

We saw from Chapter 3 that people are drawn to the Eucharist for a variety of reasons. The level of involvement varies from person to person, but the Eucharist provides one of the first memorable encounters with the person of Jesus and the life of the local church. It is a unique invitation that attracts the committed and the curious, the occasional and the daily follower. Even the most ardent Christians struggle to articulate the reason for their devotion and attachment to the Eucharist. John Paul II describes the Eucharist as standing 'at the centre of the church's life'²⁰⁸ 'the most precious possession which the church can have in her journey through history'²⁰⁹.

Given the pivotal role of the Sunday Liturgy, there was quite a mixed response from the project participants. An interesting observation from one of the interviews drew attention to the fact that the language of the Mass was now so alien and predictable that the 'homily provides the only moment that people may actually connect with'²¹⁰. The Sunday liturgy has undergone some significant alterations during its long history. Some are welcomed and some are challenging, depending on how one views and understands liturgical reform and development. The Vatican's insistence on the recent English translation text of the Roman Missal is perceived by some people as an 'abuse of power'²¹¹ and a total disregard for the voice of the faithful. Gerald O'Collins e.g. asks if God is

²⁰⁷ O'Meara, T., *Theology of Ministry*, p.12

²⁰⁸ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Rome 2003, #3.

²⁰⁹ Ibid #9

²¹⁰ Interview No 2.

²¹¹ Interview No 8

truly honoured by 'defective English, clunky words and language that persistently refuses to include over half the congregation'²¹².

From comments received in the questionnaire and interview, the Sunday liturgy clearly carries the centre ground in every parish because that is when the whole people of God comes together to worship in that place. This is also the moment that tends to spark significant controversy and tension from the perception of selective involvement to apparent exclusion. Pastorally, it is difficult to explain the whole context of Eucharist to a multi-cultural, multi-lingual congregation. Yet, they embody its very essence by their diversity and presence. The Council is clear that 'no Mass is a purely private function but rather a celebration of the whole Church'²¹³. For some people, mere presence is enough, but for others their ministerial role may well have acquired a significant and 'irreplaceable' purpose.

One of the interviewees referred to the Sunday liturgy as 'a point of reference, a point of authority, a focal moment but it's also a very public statement where we witness to the surrounding world by our collective presence'²¹⁴. Given the prime importance of the Sunday liturgy, there seems to be little or no level of practical evaluation or reflection on its planning, celebration or impact. Atli Jonsson observes that in the on Sunday 'there is scope for directly communicating in word, music, silence and gesture, the content of faith'²¹⁵. The impression given, however, is that parishes tend to observe the basic requirements of liturgical celebration but that there is an absence of reflective or imaginative input. The fact that schools have the personnel and the scope to insert drama and music at least provides some young people with a positive experience. But parishes do not enjoy the same opportunities or at least they do not seem willing or able to deploy their best resources in the service of the Sunday celebration.

²¹² O'Collins, G., S.J. from an article 'Still Far to Go', published in *The Tablet*, 9th February 2013, p.11.

²¹³ Instruction on the Eucharist as a Eucharistic Mystery, #3d.

²¹⁴ Interview No 2

²¹⁵ Sullivan, J., (editor) *Communicating Faith*, The Catholic University of America Press, from an article by Atli Jonsson entitled 'Communicating Faith in the Parish', pp. 50 – 65.

4.3.4 Adult Faith Formation

When asked to name the greatest challenges facing the parish today, adult education emerged as one of the main priorities in Question 9 of the questionnaire. It was recognised from the interviews especially that all too often parents simply go through the motions for Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation celebrations. They attend talks arranged by the parish, but only a fraction actually engage in the continuing sacramental journey.

The interviews indicated a real need in reaching out to young parents and providing some form of adult formation for their faith journey. 'There are so many things happening outside the parish. Things which grab people's attention. The obvious one is television but it's much wider than that due to computer games, the latest smart phones, mass media. These are massive distractions from the parish agenda. Parish life requires time, commitment, opportunity and effort'²¹⁶. This was expressed by a committed parent catechist with years of experience in working with young people and their parents. The view he offers is an accurate description of life today where the Church and the world provide competitive and challenging messages. Both bring messages of life and both bring strategic moments of choices and decision.

This is the kind of dilemma that David Heywood addresses when he speaks of the Church community 'falling into the trap of needs meeting'²¹⁷. Heywood identifies the special moments on the Christian's journey that are likely to trigger a special interest in the Church. The obvious response from a well meaning parish is to be there at the moment of contact and respond in the best way possible. Heywood however, maintains that the Church needs to engage in a revolution in leadership if it is to remain faithful to its real mission. Introducing a complex community to the discipline of reflection is a challenging task but one that will change and grow 'under the guidance of the Holy Spirit'²¹⁸. This is an extension of his reimagining ministry to reimagining the way we form and facilitate our community's search for a Kingdom centred spirituality. Heywood's view is that adults learn best when 'their existing experience is respected' ²¹⁹.

²¹⁶ Interview No 2

²¹⁷ Heywood, p.135

²¹⁸ Ibid 138

²¹⁹ Heywood, p.144

The challenge for the parish leadership is to be able to engage with that experience and gently introduce it to the Gospel narrative.

Vatican II outlined very clearly the distinctive role of lay people in the life, ministry and mission of the Church. The people of God were reminded in two documents; *Lumen Gentium* 37 and *Gaudium et Spes* 43 that the hierarchy do not have all the answers when it comes to education, formation or other current complex issues in the world. Lay people have the right, the competence and the responsibility to take initiatives for the common good. Heywood's call to courageous pastoral leadership finds firm support in the Council's ecclesiology to engage all the people of God in the life and mission of the Church.

The interviews indicated the value of RCIA in their communities as a very useful mechanism for introducing adults into the life of Christ and also into the life of the Church. The real value was evident in the weekly group dynamic of adult people learning together accompanied by catechists, sponsors and godparents. The various rites of welcome, sending, election and initiation also had a powerful impact on the surrounding community.

But, in some cases, the impact seems to be short lived or even regulated to an appendage status. One of the interviewees, a catechist with RCIA, indicated the challenge of materialism and secular attitude which tends to dominate life and make faith decisions for adults more difficult; 'a lot of people in the Church have the same secular attitude, it's as if they are more secular than they are Christian. but people should look to us and say; "they've got something, there is a distinctiveness about their life that's worth noting"²²⁰. There was here a sense of disappointment that the secular agenda had such a hold on people and there was little evidence of the adult Christian having the confidence to take a public stand on certain issues.

The challenge of actually finding suitably qualified personnel to facilitate training and formation for adults was noted in both the questionnaire and interviews. If the formation session was too academic it went over the heads of most people. If it was too shallow or lacked practical and pastoral experience, it was considered a waste of valuable time. Opportunities created locally within the Deanery would have a greater attraction than the prospect of travelling

²²⁰ Interview No 4

significant distances in the Diocese, where admittedly the resources may be more plentiful and engaging. Travel, time and finance are always a prime consideration and indeed an obstacle for some people.

When it comes to adult faith formation, Vatican II is clear that 'the laity are called to participate actively in the whole life of the Church; not only are they to animate the world with the Spirit of Christianity, but they are to be witnesses to Christ in all circumstances and at the very heart of the community of mankind'²²¹. Participation of this calibre certainly requires substantial formation and perhaps of a greater quality than that offered to parents at strategic moments in the lives of their children.

Parents, catechists and indeed the whole parish community, share a unique stewardship of being entrusted with the formation of the next generation of Christians. The provision of adult formation is not just beneficial to the individual parent or catechist, but also enhances the broader ecclesial community as each year and each sacrament provides a new audience. Learning is rooted in experience, and the sacramental moments provide an extraordinary opportunity to invite the whole parish to become a learning community.

²²¹ Gaudium et Spes, #43

4.3.5 Communication

From questions 9 and 13 of the questionnaire, communication was presented as a major, challenging and constant issue for the parish and Deanery agenda. Poor communication was flagged up as a serious challenge to effective ministry. In a multi-ethnic and highly diverse environment, language and words matter because they shape and sharpen perception and understanding. Effective communication articulates welcome, invitation, integration, involvement and acceptance. Poor communication creates barriers and facilitates misunderstanding. The Gospel mandate of handing on the faith (Matthew 28:19) surely expects that communication is one area that should be secure or under constant review.

All of the interviewees spoke of communication as a major concern. 'if communication does not work, everyone loses out. Recently my parish buried a time capsule and I would have loved to be there for that and put my own piece of family history into the capsule. But I did not know when it was happening. I was very upset'²²². 'There is a Church newsletter but who reads it? Sometimes they are very badly produced'²²³. 'There are so many different nationalities now and different languages and dialects in South London. It is very hard for them to understand all that is going on'²²⁴. 'Communication is vital. Everything depends on it'²²⁵. There was a clear consensus that communication was a big issue and if a parish wanted to engage effectively in the serious work of evangelisation, then communication and its derivative mechanisms would have to take pride of place.

The digital revolution of recent years has transformed communication and the way people live. We now live in an age of information overload which makes the discernment process all the more challenging. The Internet and its World Wide Web, together with blogs, text messaging, Facebook, YouTube, podcast, Twitter, Ipods and Iphones have taken communication to unbelievable frontiers, unimaginable when the Second Vatican Council opened its doors to the world of the 1960's. In 2013, 36 million adults (73%) in Great Britain accessed the

²²² Interview No 8

²²³ Interview No 4

²²⁴ Interview no 9

²²⁵ Interview No 9

internet every day, 20 million more than 2006²²⁶. The implication for parishes is that the web is constantly changing and challenging our understanding of human communications at every level.

There is no doubt that the digital revolution is here to stay and the impact on the Church is inevitable. Vatican II actively encouraged the Church to engage with the media revolution:

‘All the children of the Church should join, without delay and with the greatest effort in a common work to make effective use of the media of social communication in various apostolic endeavors, as circumstances and conditions demand. Pastors should hasten, therefore, to fulfill their duty in this respect, one which is intimately linked with their ordinary preaching responsibility. The laity, too, who have something to do with the use of these media, should endeavor to bear witness to Christ, first of all by carrying out their individual duties or office expertly and with an apostolic spirit, and, further, by being of direct help in the pastoral activity of the Church-to the best of their ability-through their technical, economic, cultural and artistic talents²²⁷ ..

A substantial obstacle to communication in South London is the presence of an enormous diversity of ethnic and cultural personnel. One of the parishes taking part in the survey for this paper, has 29 different nationalities recorded on its parish census. Another neighbouring parish has 43. A significant factor in this is the local Catholic primary school which becomes a major focus for many families anxious to secure a place for their children. A nursery and / or primary school is a constant source of new life for the community.

Parishes cannot assume that everyone speaks or understands basic English; so while many hundreds of people attend Church, the amount of information imparted and accurately received, is impossible to calculate. The problem becomes acutely apparent when major community events are launched and advertised. Unless translations are provided, the intended audience remains obscure. If translations are provided, the actual choice of languages to use becomes a difficult decision that can easily be misinterpreted as a bias towards one ethnic group or another..

David Heywood maintains that to communicate and contextualise the Gospel effectively, ‘we need insight into the mindset of the people to whom we wish to

²²⁶ Internet access in UK office for National Statistics, <http://www.ons.gov.uk> accessed 4 April, 2014.

²²⁷ Decree on the Media of Social Communications, *Inter Mirifica*, December 1963, #13ff

bring it'²²⁸. This journey of discernment and listening, according to Heywood, 'will reveal the powers that dominate their lives'²²⁹. The challenge here is to understand, identify and empathise with the enormous diversity of culture and custom that now finds a home in South London. It is a major task but essential to the Church's mission and life.

A useful pastoral strategy towards communication is for the parish leadership to identify and reach out to the local leadership of the various ethnic groups. Ethnic groups all tend to have key people who become points of reference for their own crowd. To network these leaders together, specifically inviting them to participate in various parish ministries, including membership of the Parish Pastoral Council, will go some way to providing a method of integration into the life of the local community. International evenings become a real social encounter when people are invited to bring and share their food, customs and traditions.

A further strategy is to invite each ethnic group to take responsibility for a given Sunday liturgy. Some groups take great pride in turning out in national dress, taking responsibility for having a reading or prayers of intercession in their own language. The opportunity to get involved in the parish liturgy provides a significant stepping stone towards further integration. The challenge for the rest of the community is to respect and appreciate the different gifts, talents and charisms as an integral part of the ecclesial community, the Body of Christ.

In the present day of multimedia communication, the existence of a parish website was deemed to be an essential asset. Evidence from parish newsletters indicates that most parishes have a parish website of some kind, but consistent maintenance could well be an issue to resolve. There is a perception in some parishes that having a website is sufficient in itself, but unless monitoring and maintenance of both image and content is actively and consistently pursued, parishes are missing a valuable opportunity of outreach and contact.

The real issue with communication, however, is the readiness of the network of personnel who are responsible for events and activities at parish or Deanery level, to implement a method of communication which ensures that the people

²²⁸ Heywood, p.103.

²²⁹ Ibid p.103

who need to know what is planned are adequately, accurately and consistently informed. Parish Newsletters surfaced as being far from ideal when it comes to presentation and informing the congregation of special events and activities,.

Thought must also be given to those people who do not have access to the internet. The value of person to person communication at all levels remains an essential priority.

Many parishes have websites, although some are poorly maintained. Matt Warner observes that 'if somebody can't find your website, you don't exist' ²³⁰. Warner maintains that parishes need to generate information to people in a way that they want to receive it. Email, text messaging, blogging, podcasting, Twitter and video presentation are all accessible and form the grammar of communication in today's world. Parishes may well be some distance behind all these communication ingredients and techniques, but by not using them, as Warner points out, the message to visitors and new arrivals is that 'we cannot even be bothered to speak your language' ²³¹.

Parishes are encouraged to use every means at their disposal to connect with existing parishioners as well as the annual or bi-annual attendees of Christmas and Easter ²³². In a world of instant access, communication in the parish is slow and sporadic. In some cases, communication systems are simply non-existent by today's standards.

Benedict XVI sees the new technologies as a 'gift to humanity' ²³³ and challenges the young Church to bring the witness of their faith to evangelise the digital world. 'Without fear', says Benedict, 'we must set sail on the digital sea'²³⁴. Benedict sees the digital world as a ripe mission field for the Church.

²³⁰ Vogt, B. *The Church and New Media*, Our Sunday Visitor, Indiana 2011, from an article by Matt Warner: New Media in the parish, p.131 – 148.

²³¹ Vogt, B., Matt Warner, p.146.

²³² Benedict XVI, 'Priests are thus challenged to proclaim the Gospel by employing the latest generation of audio-visual resources (images, videos, animated features, blogs, websites) which, alongside traditional means, can open up broad new vistas for dialogue, evangelisation and catechesis'. Message for the 44th World Communications Day 2010.

²³³ Benedict XVI, 43rd World Communications Day, address 2009.

²³⁴ Benedict XVI, 2010

4.3.6 Recruitment and Training of Catechists

Question 9 drew attention to the necessity of the recruitment and formation of catechists. Question 10 highlighted the necessity of more lay involvement in the work of the Church. There is evidence from both questionnaire and interview that catechists in particular would value the opportunity to share best practice with neighbouring parishes. The interviews endorsed these views and affirmed the need to recruit more people but also asked parishes to find ways to value those already engaged in the challenging work of evangelisation.

Catechists remain on the front line of the Church's life and mission. The interviews gave hard evidence of the crucial role that the catechists have in the whole work of evangelisation at local parish level. Every sacramental programme requires their presence, input and commitment. But there was also the issue for some catechists of being trapped in specific ministries because once they had agreed to help with some programme of sacramental preparation activity for a year, the expectation was that they would be there again the following year. 'once you commit to something, it's very hard to turn around and say you don't want to do it because you feel guilty within yourself and the expectation that you will be there the next time can be pressurising',²³⁵.

The issue of recruitment, formation and retention of catechists surfaced quite strongly in the interviews. One view is that it would be easier to 'say yes to a year rather than yes to forever',²³⁶. The time issue again surfaced as a hindrance and also the fact that gifted people are almost abandoned in their ministry simply because they enjoy the task, they are good at what they do, they deliver the programme and their reliability is not in doubt.

While Question 3 indicated some degree of formation and training, it is also obvious that quite a lot of people drawn into the work of catechesis are actually learning on the job. One of the interviewees was quite adamant that formation for catechists was absolutely essential. 'It's a question of understanding. If you don't understand it yourself, you cannot hold on to something that you do not

²³⁵ Interview No 8

²³⁶ Interview No 4

fully understand, and if you are not convinced about something yourself, you will never sell it to someone else'²³⁷.

This interviewee had long experience as a catechist and formed the opinion that something so fundamental to our faith like the Eucharist, or indeed any of the sacraments, requires significant understanding, conviction and actual good example if we are going to be living witnesses to the Gospel in the world. Otherwise we just show up at strategic moments and convey the impression of commitment. Surface commitment is never convincing and people quickly recognise it for what it is. The weakness of some parish catechetical programmes is that they are simply perceived as means to receiving a sacrament. Once the sacrament is received, there is no further need to participate further.

It would seem that very few parents actually engage with any kind of faith formation once their children move on from primary school. It would also seem that the majority of those who do explore their faith are motivated by the sacramental celebrations of their children.

David Heywood addresses this when he speaks about the process of adult formation and learning through theological reflection. Christian learning, according to Heywood, 'is not just learning about God and Christian faith, but learning to see the world through the lens of Christian faith and worship'²³⁸. Heywood maintains that to be able to reflect well, people need guidance on the kinds of questions to be asking: questions like; where is God in this situation? What does God want me to learn through this? Then they need confidence to be able to draw on the great riches of the Christian tradition; scriptures, liturgy, hymns and poetry, as well as formal theology.

Heywood maintains that knowledge is useful as a treasure chest for future reflection' but knowledge is not sufficient on its own'²³⁹. The skill of reflection requires a maturity of attitude. Such maturity will only come from an experience of reflection with like-minded people. It also requires the confidence to be able to be 'open to the unfamiliar rather than being dismissive, having the patience to wait for insight rather than anxiety or hurry, be willing to change rather than fear

²³⁷ Interview No 4.

²³⁸ Heywood, D., *Transforming Preaching*, SPCK, 2013, p.51

²³⁹ Heywood, p.53

change²⁴⁰. This kind of process formation will not happen overnight or in isolated moments of training. The most important factor for Heywood is that no one reflects alone. We are all part of the Body of Christ and to reflect is to draw on the corporate wisdom of that body and Christian tradition.

Heywood's philosophy presents a healthy challenge for parish catechesis. It also presents a formidable task for the parish leadership. This kind of mature reflection on experience and Christian tradition does not happen by accident. It requires someone with insight to recognise the need, invite the catechists to come together, secure the services of an experienced facilitator and engage in a process of reimagining their ministry as they reflect on the merger of actual experience and Gospel insight.

Heywood holds the view that theological reflection at local parish level will draw more people into the art and practice of looking at how we do things as a community. This in turn will also inform people as to what is being done and why things are done in a particular way. The more people are drawn into an understanding of ministry, the more they are likely to take ownership and responsibility for the catechetical life of the parish. Heywood maintains however, that some hierarchical churches have a built-in resistance to reflection, 'because reflection tends to question the status quo'²⁴¹. But given the sharp reduction in ordained personnel, the catechist is a crucial resource for the transmission of faith.

There is strong evidence from the questionnaire and interviews of the need for succession planning in relation to catechists. It is not good pastoral policy to wait until a key catechist moves away or dies before consideration is given to their succession. The challenge of actually finding suitably qualified personnel to facilitate training and formation was noted in both the questionnaire and interviews. If the formation session was too academic it went over the heads of most people. If it was too shallow or lacked practical and pastoral experience, it was considered a waste of valuable time. It is hard to find the right balance. Opportunities created locally within the Deanery would have a greater attraction than the prospect of travelling significant distances in the Diocese, where admittedly the resources may be more plentiful and engaging.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, p.53

²⁴¹ Heywood, D., *Reimagining Ministry*, SCM Press, 2011, p.201

Formation needs to include a real awareness and understanding of the multi-cultural nature of parish life in South London which the catechists are called and commissioned to serve. The parish, according to John Paul II, is ‘the pre-eminent place for catechesis’²⁴². The parish catechesis will cascade to the school and the family. The aim of formation is to ‘build on the human qualities already present, develop them and add the necessary skills for a fruitful ministry’²⁴³. The Deanery is a prime site for formation as it could invite and incorporate catechists from surrounding parishes. The opportunity to meet, share best practice, discuss pastoral responsibility and pray together is a very useful strategy. With appropriate pastoral formation, training and encouragement, it is possible that some catechists may go on to become employed lay pastoral workers with greater co-responsibility for parish life. In this case, financial remuneration must be considered as ‘a matter of justice and not of benevolence’²⁴⁴.

Given the importance of the catechists’ role, a parish or Deanery would do well to identify and allocate a budget for training and formation so that experienced, informed and skilled facilitators are engaged for the task. The *Guide for Catechists* makes clear that ‘haphazard individual initiatives are not enough. There should be an organised programme for catechists covering their spiritual and pastoral growth’²⁴⁵. The Guide also makes an interesting reference to seminary formation where future priests should be taught to ‘value and respect the catechists as apostles and fellow workers in the Lord’s vineyard’²⁴⁶.

‘Catechesis is the responsibility of the entire Christian community’²⁴⁷. *The General Directory for Catechesis* delivers some challenging facts about where responsibility lies in relation to parish catechesis. The Bishops are ‘beyond all others the ones primarily responsible for catechesis and catechesis par excellence’²⁴⁸. The guidelines are there for all to see but some parishes may still lack the resources and leadership required to facilitate the challenge and the opportunity of reflection, formation and growth.

²⁴² John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, #67

²⁴³ *Guide for Catechists*, Rome 1993, #21.

²⁴⁴ *Guide for Catechists*, #32

²⁴⁵ *Guide for Catechists*, #29.

²⁴⁶ *Guide for Catechists*, #35.

²⁴⁷ *General Directory of Catechesis*, #220.

²⁴⁸ GDC #222. See also *Catechesi Tradendae*, #63b.

While David Heywood introduces us to the wisdom of theological reflection, John Paul II introduces us to the calibre of catechist that the local Church requires. He sees catechists as ‘specialists, direct witnesses, and irreplaceable evangelisers’²⁴⁹ essential to the *Missio Dei*. He observes that catechesis itself should be ‘a sacred duty and inalienable right’²⁵⁰. At the same time he warns against routine and improvisation setting in in parishes, because ‘routine leads to stagnation, lethargy and eventual paralysis while improvisation begets confusion’²⁵¹. The advice from the Church in the light of the New Evangelisation is to find new ways to articulate and communicate the faith but the content must contain the wisdom and authentic teaching of Jesus. The catechist, according to the Church’s guidelines, ‘is not a simple substitute for the priest but a witness of Christ in the community’²⁵².

4.3.7 The Young Church

The Young Church emerged as a priority item in Questions 10 and 13 of the questionnaire. All of the interviews had references to young people and while some of the interviewees were hopeful of the future, others were despondent because of the great absence of the younger generation from ‘official practices’.

One of the interviewees had difficulty in establishing what the term ‘young Church’ meant and where do you draw the line in determining exactly what categorises ‘young’. While she understood the absence of teenagers, she held the view that ‘young’ also applied to a large number of young parents in their 20’s and 30’s who were also absent from the Church. ‘I know several young parents who are separated and perhaps divorced, single parent families who want to be involved in Church but feel embarrassed or worried that they might not be accepted’²⁵³. There is a concern that we may just regard the Young Church as referring to those in their teenage years but it may also embrace young adults who are also searching for the sacred.

²⁴⁹ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, #73. See also The Code of Canon Law, c.785#1.

²⁵⁰ John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, #14

²⁵¹ John Paul II, CT #17

²⁵² *Guide for Catechists*, from the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, Rome, 1993, #3.

²⁵³ Interview No 7.

From the interviews especially, there seems to be adequate spiritual provision for children at primary school level, especially at the First Communion stage. However, there is a significant gap between First Eucharist (age 8) and Confirmation (age 12) and then there is effectively no provision at all unless a parish happens to have a youth club that has some kind of spiritual dimension. Even then, the club will probably meet on a Friday evening and nothing happens all week until the following Friday. It is acknowledged that the gaps in formation for young people are great.

Another interviewee maintained that 'if there is a genuine interest in young people, young people will respond, so if young people are made welcome, that there is a place for them, that they can contribute and do something rather than just sit and listen, then they feel they have a part to play, then they can think, yes, we too can be Church'²⁵⁴. The implication here is that there is an acute need for the provision of youth leadership ministry and most parishes will struggle with that task because the personnel are either not readily available or there is no one in a strategic pastoral position to discern their presence and empower their ministry in the community.

At the close of Vatican II, there was a very clear appeal to the young people of the world.

'Lastly, it is to you, young men and women of the world, that the Council wishes to address its final message. For it is you who are to receive the torch from the hands of your elders and to live in the world at the period of the most gigantic transformations ever realized in its history. It is you who, receiving the best of the example of the teaching of your parents and your teachers, are to form the society of tomorrow. You will either save yourselves or you will perish with it'²⁵⁵.

While this appeal is noble and genuine it is also very aspirational. It's the kind of prophetic speech that perhaps you would expect to hear from Vatican II. It is addressed philosophically to the next generation and provides encouragement for those who are able to read the signs of the times and act on them. But at the end of the day, each parish community struggles to engage this young Church in order to ensure the directives are fulfilled.

²⁵⁴ Interview No 9.

²⁵⁵ Paul VI, address to the young people of the world at the close of Vatican II, 8 December 1965.

Thomas O'Meara observes that 'ministry is born at the interaction of three gifts; the Spirit, the human personality and the local Church'²⁵⁶. The privilege entrusted to the parish community is that each young person is given the opportunity to celebrate this interaction of grace and gift, beginning with Baptism. While additional spiritual seeds are sown at various stages, i.e. First Eucharist and Confirmation, the success rate of handing on the faith or 'receiving the torch' is impossible to quantify. When Paul VI concluded Vatican II, he said; 'for four years the Church has been working to rejuvenate her image in order to respond better to the design of her founder'²⁵⁷, yet the anxiety levels of many parents is acute when they realise that this rejuvenated Church is no longer relevant to the lives of their children.

From the questionnaire and interviews, there is a philosophical yearning for youth provision. There is evidence of genuine regret, indeed paralysis, at the haemorrhaging young Church. One of the difficulties encountered was the perception that every parish felt obliged to provide its own response to the young people in its domain. Of the five participating parishes, three had some provision for young people, but there was general agreement that provision was sporadic and far from ideal.

As one of the interviewees indicated, the school may have 'the resources and the personnel to deliver and engage with young people on special occasions, but the parish system simply may not have the connectivity required'²⁵⁸. As two of the parishes had part-time, paid youth ministers, a view was expressed that if the Deanery could collectively invest in a full time youth pastoral worker, there could be a genuine effort at co-ordinating youth ministry in the immediate area. Michael Edwards makes the point that for many young people, the parish plays little or no part in their faith journey and 'the school is their only real experience of church'²⁵⁹.

There is a clearly a pastoral need for parishes to combine talents, share resources and recognise what can be achieved by working together. Such an initiative however, requires a shared strategic plan for young people in the area,

²⁵⁶ O'Meara, T.F., *Theology of Ministry*, p.215

²⁵⁷ Paul VI, 8 December 1965.

²⁵⁸ Interview No 7.

²⁵⁹ Sullivan, J.,(editor) *Communicating Faith*, The Catholic University of America Press, 2011. From an article 'Leadership and Transmission' by Michael Edwards, pp149-164.

an inter-parish agreement on the financial implication and the courage to pilot a mutually agreed vision. This would require participation from both young and old who are prepared to share in and learn from an inter-generational encounter. It also presupposes that all involved appreciate that the purpose of such an initiative is designed to serve the Mission of God rather than just the locally perceived need.

4.3.8 Identifying the Needs of all the faithful – Reading the Signs of the Times

Question 9 named one of the greatest challenges in parish life as identifying the needs of the faithful. This issue also emerged in Question 4 in relation to deploying the best skills so as to benefit the whole community. Question 6 also touched on this in regards to poor communication. Question 15 expressed some moments of frustration when certain gifts were not recognised or harnessed even though they were offered to the parish in good faith.

There was a common consensus from both interview and questionnaire that identifying the needs of the faithful was a crucial first step towards forming any kind of parish pastoral policy of outreach. An interesting observation by some of the interviewees is that once you begin to identify, discern and name the needs of the community, 'you will also discover hidden talents and gifts that you never knew existed'²⁶⁰.

Vatican II outlines the presence of the Spirit's charisms in the people of God and 'from the reception of these charisms, even the most ordinary ones, there arises for each of the faithful the right and duty of exercising them in the Church and in the world, in the freedom of the Holy Spirit who breathes where he wills'²⁶¹. Here the Council affirms the gifts of the Holy Spirit rooted in Baptism and called to build up the Body of Christ by witness, worship and service. It is worth noting that these charisms are not presented as private gifts. They are meant for the whole Church. This incredible ecclesiology supports the fact that the local Church community is a divine gift and is always coming to be, participating in the *Missio Dei*.

It was acknowledged in the interviews that a great deal of energy is at work in every parish community. However, unless the people of God are invited to reflect and evaluate their role in the community, identify and celebrate their gifts and charisms, and be empowered to engage in some form of positive outreach, there is a distinct possibility of religious routine becoming the accepted, established and exclusive norm. This is a kind of parochialism that stifles the Spirit.

²⁶⁰ Interview #9

²⁶¹ *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, #3

David Heywood makes the point that 'where a Church is focused on its own concerns, it is deeply unsatisfying. Increasingly, says Heywood, 'people are looking for a faith that informs, empowers and integrates the whole of life'²⁶². Heywood reflects the sentiments of a community that is searching for more than just the Sunday and weekday services. The pressures of life are intense especially in South London where ethnic, cultural and economic concerns dictate the quality of life. The parish is in a uniquely strategic position to meet the people precisely where they are at on their journey of life. But for that encounter to happen, identifying the needs of the people of God must feature significantly and permanently on the local pastoral agenda.

This is why Heywood is pushing his Kingdom-centred rather than Church-centred approach to pastoral ministry based on the recognition that mission takes place outside the four walls of the Church, in the public square. The goal of mission and the purpose of the Church's existence, according to Heywood, is 'to realise the Kingdom of God, to offer a glimpse of God's promised future in the present'²⁶³. To achieve this level of encounter and understanding, people need to be challenged and encouraged to look for the signs of God's kingdom in their known and familiar culture of life.

One of the interviewees spoke from long years of parish experience and frustration and observes how a parish can simply grind to a halt because of the absence of any real effort of engaging the people in reflection, identifying the local needs or determining the purpose of the parish itself.

'I think the challenge is actually how to get people more fully involved and agree with the idea that once you identify talent and then how in fact you can actually get that talent to be more utilized. In some cases it's also helping lay people develop their leadership role and their skills and I think that is a job particularly for parish priests initially because they have to identify what their own ministry is and then go out to the huge amount of talent around them. My experience of parish priests is they can be quite different, some can be quite autocratic and some can be quite democratic and some can be none, collaborative in theory but not in practice'²⁶⁴.

Identifying the needs of people is a decision that needs to be taken by the parish leadership team. It assumes, of course, that the clergy are open to what

²⁶² Heywood, D., Reimagining Ministry, p.66

²⁶³ Heywood, p.67

²⁶⁴ Interview No 7

might be perceived by them as a fairly high risk strategy, depending on their ecclesiological understanding. Some clergy are not comfortable with naming the perceived negatives in parish life. Some clergy are not secure enough in their own role to invite the whole community to reflect and evaluate on what we do well, what we could do better and what is missing from parish life.

The pastoral exercise of identifying the needs of the faithful is a very sensitive process that requires the combined wisdom of both lay and ordained who can share the responsibility of discernment together in prayer. The interface of the secular and the sacred, 'the exchange of gifts'²⁶⁵ helps to connect people to the grace of the divine imagination at work in the world.

Developing a culture of community evaluation takes courage on the part of the leadership of the parish. It also takes time. There is a substantial case to be made for the whole parish community to be engaged in prayer, discernment and reflection in order to identify the pastoral issues that generate energy and life. Parishioners are well placed to name the gaps in parish life that require focused thought and attention. A skill worth developing is how to confront the issues rather than each other. Awareness, according to Robert Schreiter, is the first step towards transformation²⁶⁶. Forming a ministry of welcome, fostering indigenous leadership and seeking the views of all the people of God in a multi-ethnic community, become crucial steps towards the process of awareness, growth and metanoia.

The absence of identifying needs was highlighted at interview as a significant area of concern. One interviewee identified a huge challenge in 'respecting the other person's position in life whatever that may be'²⁶⁷. Sometimes the alienation of vulnerable people from the Church because of attitude and or official church teaching became a real challenge especially if you know someone in that situation. Divorced and re married people being denied access to the sacraments was of great concern because it gives the impression of alienating the very people we are called on as Christians to embrace²⁶⁸. The

²⁶⁵ *Gaudium et Spes*, #40

²⁶⁶ Schreiter, R., *Constructing Local Theologies*, Orbis Books, New York, 2002, p.5

²⁶⁷ Interview No 1

²⁶⁸ See the Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church concerning the Reception of Holy Communion by divorced and re married Members of the Faithful. 'The mistaken conviction of a divorced and remarried person that he may receive Holy Communion normally presupposes

number of people in parishes who are in second or third relationships is significant and their experience of a church encounter can be negative, judgemental and dismissive. It was encouraging to hear Pope Francis say that the Eucharist was not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak²⁶⁹.

A similar concern emerges with gay and lesbian people or those in same sex relationships. While the Church seems to hold all vulnerable people in high regard and reaches out to them with documented pastoral policy²⁷⁰, the perceived impression by some people at parish level, is often one of 'intolerance and disregard'²⁷¹. Yet, John Paul II maintains that the Church must consider it 'one of her principal duties at every stage of history and especially in our modern age, to proclaim and to introduce into life the mystery of mercy'²⁷².

One of the most useful initiatives for the parish community is to establish a Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) or Parish Forum to be the eyes and ears of the whole community. This would be a representative group, selected, elected or nominated from a cross section of the community. Operating from pastoral terms of reference rather than a legalistic constitution would help the group to identify and focus on the real needs of the community. The job description of a PPC would be to (a) reflect prayerfully on the whole community and prioritise initiatives to be undertaken; (b) facilitate on-going formation for existing parish groups; (c) ensure that effective communication takes place within the parish, while filtering communication from the Deanery and Diocese; (d) recognise and build on work already done, (e) review the life and activities of the parish in

that personal conscience is considered in the final analysis to be able, on the basis of one's own convictions, to come to a decision about the existence or absence of a previous marriage and the value of the new union. However, such a position is inadmissible. Marriage, in fact, because it is both the image of the spousal relationship between Christ and his Church as well as the fundamental core and an important factor in the life of civil society, is essentially a public reality'. Rome 1994, #7.

²⁶⁹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #48

²⁷⁰ See *Persona Humana*, Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics, 'In the pastoral field, these homosexuals must certainly be treated with understanding and sustained in the hope of overcoming their personal difficulties and their inability to fit into society. Their culpability will be judged with prudence. But no pastoral method can be employed which would give moral justification to these acts on the grounds that they would be consonant with the condition of such people. For according to the objective moral order, homosexual relations are acts which lack an essential and indispensable finality. In Sacred Scripture they are condemned as a serious depravity and even presented as the sad consequence of rejecting God. This judgment of Scripture does attest to the fact that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and can in no case be approved of'. Rome 1975. #8.

²⁷¹ Interview No 11

²⁷² John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, Rome 1978, #14.

order to enable the Kingdom of God to flourish. A formed PPC would also liberate the priest to be priest. To serve the people of God effectively implies that we are actually in touch with their needs and understand them rather than just supplying them with prefabricated solutions.

If the parish leadership wants to be courageous and prophetic in identifying the needs of the whole people of God, it would also reach out to those for whom the Church is no longer relevant. Their views would be informative, insightful and challenging. They would also add substance and credibility to the work of the new evangelisation.

4.3.9 The Intercultural Mission of the Church

Question 6 of the empirical section named the multiplicity of languages as a barrier and a challenge to ministry in the parish. Language holds the key to access, understanding and progress. It is simply not possible to assume that everyone understands and communicates in English, especially the older generation of migrants. Question 9 highlighted communication as an issue and question 10 drew attention to the challenge faced by the Sunday Liturgy in addressing the many cultures, customs and traditions that come to the parish for worship. Question 12 focused on the value of celebrating the diversity of culture outside the Eucharist and particularly drew attention to the advantage of international social gatherings in the community, where food is shared, minds meet and relationships are formed.

The parish in South London today has become a complex jigsaw of diversity. Migrants, according to a recent study, are a living sign of the 'pilgrim state of the church, made up of all those, regardless of race or national origins, who have been called to the banquet and responded'²⁷³. (Luke 14:23). This document stresses the pastoral need for a ministry of welcome to build communion, and to nurture a community of faith, fellowship, prayer and worship.

²⁷³ *Mission of the Church to Migrants in England and Wales*, Catholic Bishops Conference, CTS 2008, p.17

Some people, especially young immigrant parents, feel swamped by the host culture, and there is a perceived security in remaining low key and hidden among their own people. John O'Donohue describes this sense of alienation in one of his poems, '*No one knows you, the language slows you. Nothing of yours has happened here*'²⁷⁴. The approach for baptism, however, or school entry for children provides an enormous moment of social, psychological, educational and spiritual engagement.

Some evidence of isolation and depression among immigrants is recorded in *The Ground of Justice* ²⁷⁵ but the report also highlights the fact that the parish community can be a powerful counterpoint to this sense of isolation. However, this report also states that when the parish fails to actively reach out in welcome and acceptance, the harm caused is quite significant and deep. The journey to the Kingdom, according to Timothy Radcliffe, 'starts where people actually are' ²⁷⁶. The Church lives, and needs to be experienced, within the culture of its time.

Given the extensive presence of so many nationalities, there was an overwhelming desire, from questionnaire to interview, to involve more people in the life of the parish community. Question 4 articulated the need to develop skills on how to deploy existing resources to benefit the whole community. Question 11 indicated that new people are encouraged to register in the parish but this is rarely followed up in any tangible way. There was also evidence that the priest tries to personify welcome on Sunday, but most of the congregation are isolated in their own ethnic community concerns. The view was also expressed (Q11) that the numbers are there but the integration is missing.

The five multi-ethnic parishes that participated in the survey have an average Mass attendance on Sunday of 5666²⁷⁷ people. The number of parishioners actively involved in ministry would probably be about 100 per parish. The majority therefore would seem to have a devotional, almost passive presence

²⁷⁴ O'Donohue, J., *Benedictus*, A Book of Blessings, Bantam Press, London 2007, p.124

²⁷⁵ *The Ground of Justice*, the report of a Pastoral Research Enquiry into the needs of Migrants in London's Catholic Community, Von Hugel Institute, St Edmund's College, Cambridge, 2007. p.29

²⁷⁶ Radcliffe, T., a response to *On the Way to Life*, 2005, p.6

²⁷⁷ Archdiocese of Southwark, Catholic Directory 2012.

on Sunday, while a small strategic group form the basis of, and take responsibility for, practical and pastoral engagement.

There is significant activity in each parish community but there are some people who do not seem connected to anything outside the formal Sunday liturgy. For many people this is a matter of choice. David Heywood talks about the 'hidden curriculum of the local Church'²⁷⁸, the learning that goes on quietly but does not appear on any timetable. It is impossible to measure but contributes significantly to the development of the entire community. The multicultural, multi-ethnic components of the parish plays a major part in this process of hidden learning. Undoubtedly, we are shaped by the culture we live in whether we are aware of it or not.

Heywood highlights some instances e.g. the way children and older people are treated, the facilities provided for them, the culture and attitude of welcome, the invitation to be involved, 'even the values that lie behind these messages'²⁷⁹. All these are factors of learning in the multicultural environment though perhaps not explicitly advertised as such. They help to form the ethos of the place. Heywood sees this as the most pervasive form of learning in a multi-ethnic Christian community. When you consider the parish community in South London, with all its multiplicity of culture and custom, sometimes we underestimate the extent of formation that actually goes on.

Vatican II sees humankind as the author of all culture and in the person of Christ, God speaks to the culture proper to every age. 'Whenever there is a question of human life, nature and culture are intimately connected'²⁸⁰. *Gaudium et Spes* observes that 'the Church has been sent to all ages and nations and is not tied exclusively or indissolubly to any race or nation, to any particular way of life or any customary practices, ancient or modern'²⁸¹. The Church has the advantage of almost being a neutral player but can never actually stay on the side-lines. The Good News she carries transcends, permeates and transforms every culture.

²⁷⁸ Heywood, *Reimagining Ministry*, p.126

²⁷⁹ Ibid p.127

²⁸⁰ *Gaudium et Spes*, #,53

²⁸¹ Ibid #58

The real challenge here is to see the whole parish as a learning community and 'an agent of faith development'²⁸². The agenda addressed by the parish covers a very wide range of pastoral and practical initiatives. The presence of a primary school ensures a constant source of new personnel. The sacraments of initiation, particularly Baptism, First Eucharist and Confirmation will always guarantee new opportunities for contact, catechesis, involvement and evangelisation. These are significant moments of transition and formation. They demand the best resources available.

A key strategy for a formed Parish Pastoral Council in a multi-cultural community, will be to enable and encourage participation by as many people as possible in every aspect of parish life, but also to monitor and evaluate where the parish itself is at on its faith journey. If the parish fails to exercise some form of community evaluation, activities can grow stale, routine persists and quality personnel may begin to shop around for a more challenging and fulfilling environment. The perception of a closed shop or exclusive mentality in any parish community will surely trigger an exodus by those who have the ability to discern alternatives. It may well take courage to ask the questions and face the answers, but the result will inform a listening leadership about the exact location of priority objectives. It is worth noting a provocative question from Pope Francis recently when he invited his audience to consider; 'what do I do to make the church a community where everyone feels welcomed and understood?'²⁸³.

The instruction *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* (The Love of Christ towards Migrants) strongly emphasises the importance of establishing a definite culture of 'welcome and solidarity'²⁸⁴ towards migrants in the local church community. The instruction however, is clear, that this cannot just be a cosmetic exercise. It means local churches must 'rethink pastoral care'²⁸⁵. Craig Van Gelder takes the view that cultural diversity needs to be understood as 'a gift from God to be

²⁸² *Share the Good News, National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland*, Irish Episcopal Conference, Veritas, Dublin 2010, p.190.

²⁸³ Pope Francis, general audience, Rome, 29th May 2013.

²⁸⁴ *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*, Rome 2004, #39

²⁸⁵ Ibid #41. See also *The Dispossessed, a Guide to the Catholic Church's concern for refugees and Migrants*, published by the Catholic Bishops Conference of England & Wales, 2004. Also – *Mission of the Church to Migrants in England & Wales, - Recommendations for Pastoral Action #4.4*, 2008.

celebrated rather than a problem to be solved'²⁸⁶. Such an understanding would surely trigger some form of outreach.

4.3.10 Power and Isolation

Given the crucial role of the ordained in parish practice, this section is included in order to sharpen the awareness of interdependence and partnership of clergy and lay people as co-responsible partners in the mission of the local Church. The clergy emerged in all the interviews with a variety of different perceptions from the respondents and interviewees. Some people saw them as servants of the Gospel, entrusted with the responsibility and privilege of being leaders and servants in the ministry of the Church. Others saw them as exploitative power figures or people in isolation, depending on individual experience..

In question 6, one respondent observed; 'when the priest changes, everything changes, there is no consistency of vision'²⁸⁷. 'The parish priest is the greatest challenge, he shapes everything according to his vision, but his vision may not suit everyone'²⁸⁸. Some of the interviews were more detailed saying that the priest is an obstacle to community development because of his 'traditional power image, right wing views and absence of people skills'²⁸⁹. There was an impression too that sometimes clergy manipulated power without fully realising its impact.

David Heywood observes that: 'the existence of a professional clergy creates a passive laity'²⁹⁰. According to Heywood, the historical myth and expectation of omniscience in the clergy has played a major part in the gulf that separates clergy and lay people today. This culture of passivity has contributed significantly to the way parishes are managed, with an army of volunteers, dependent on the skill and vision of one pastor in charge. A great deal will depend on the pastor's ability and willingness to delegate and work

²⁸⁶ Van Gelder, C., *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, BakerBooks, Michigan, 2009, p.51

²⁸⁷ Questionnaire, #.6

²⁸⁸ Ibid #6

²⁸⁹ Interview No 1

²⁹⁰ Heywood, D., *Reimagining Ministry*, SCM Press 2011, p.5.

collaboratively. Sharing responsibility will be an added bonus, if it has a place at all in the pastoral equation.

A view emerged from the interviews, particularly from the ordained participants, that clergy feel isolated and under intense pressure because of (a) their decline in numbers, (b) the expectation to carry on as if nothing has changed, (c) sustaining the number and times of Sunday Masses because of the financial implication of reducing them and (d) their celibate way of life. Whatever their status, they are all in positions of trust, often meeting people at the extremities of life and at the limits of their vulnerability. One of the interviewees commented on the extent of power and influence conferred on the priest: 'the parish community is much more than the priest. There are lots of people involved and some of the people may be able to take leading roles in the community which would not necessitate that a priest is always present. It could be that the priest visits from time to time'²⁹¹.

In the present day, there is acute concern about arranging pastoral cover during vacation and especially during illness. The availability and willingness of supply priests to take on additional pastoral work is not always readily forthcoming. A further source of frustration for the parish community was the poor quality of English among some of the clergy emerging from different ethnic backgrounds and cultures. 'People complain because they just can't understand the accent and particularly if it involves sensitive issues such as baptisms, weddings and especially funerals'²⁹². There is some resistance to ethnic clergy among the indigenous people, but on the other hand, their own people are delighted to meet them and frequently the ethnic chaplains make a point of celebrating services among their own nationalities.

There was also a perception that many of the experienced priests of today were actually ordained for yesterday's Church. The Church they grew up in, and was formed by, has simply vanished. A perception emerged, especially from the interviews, of an acute lack of understanding by some clergy of the people entrusted to their care. One of the respondents in the questionnaire expressed

²⁹¹ Interview #9

²⁹² Interview #9

the wish for 'a formation day for clergy on how to value their people'²⁹³. There is a certain inherited dependency in parishes that some clergy seem to foster because it apparently preserves and sustains authority and power. In reality, it actually serves to disempower the people caught up in its web.

Thomas O'Meara observes how the Church sometimes lost sight of the servant aspect of ministry; 'when the Church replaces the Kingdom of God with its organisation, adorns itself with unwarranted divine prerogatives or develops ecclesiastical life in neurotic searches for disfigured power, the Church is giving up its modality of bring a servant of grace and strives to be an agent of control'²⁹⁴. O'Meara sees this as a very flawed understanding of both ministry and Church. Kenan Osborne traces the power issue to the Council of Trent where the essence of the sacrament of Holy Orders was understood to be a conferral of power. 'Power became the primary theological understanding of Orders whereas in the early church 'service' had been the primary theological focus'²⁹⁵.

Clergy now find themselves dealing with major issues of transition. Issues like the closure and merging of parishes were not on the seminary agenda in the 1960's, 70's, 80's or indeed 90's. Amalgamation of parishes into pastoral areas may seem like a practical solution to the shortage of clergy, but this process simply buys time and has a huge impact on long established communities. The negative impact of closure is that people actually lose their parish church. Years of loyalty, family history and spiritual connections are effectively severed overnight. When two parishes merge, there is a loss of identity for both and consolidation takes time. Hans Kung holds the view that

²⁹³ Question 4

²⁹⁴ O'Meara, T., *Theology of Ministry*, p.227.

²⁹⁵ Osborne, K., *Orders and Ministry*, Orbis Books, New York, 2006, p.57ff. The clearest expression of the idea of power being conferred in Holy Orders is found in the Canons of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) In the so called minor orders the power to open the church doors was conferred by the Order of Porter. The power to cast out devils was conferred by the order of Exorcist and the power to proclaim the Word was conferred by the order of Lector. The power to assist at Mass was conferred by the Order of Acolyte. In the major orders, the order of sub deacon, deacon and priest, the powers conferred was in relation to the centrality of the Eucharist. In the case of priesthood, the power to celebrate the Eucharist and forgive sins was conferred and came to define priesthood until Vatican II.

combining parishes simply 'disguises the crisis, alienates the faithful from the church and in the long term will lead to a collapse in pastoral care'²⁹⁶.

The pressure on clergy who have to preside over these transitions, and in some cases absorb some of the 'blame' for their impact and implication, is disturbing. The feeling of isolation is real, and the pastoral support which is expected from Diocesan management, may not always materialise as expected or anticipated. When it comes to understanding, celebrating and living their ministry, the clergy have a formidable agenda to hold in balance.

The issue of child abuse has taken its toll as it generates an awkward suspicion that has grown from the long list of high profile cases in the media. There is also a loss of morale and a certain reluctance on the part of some clergy to be identified with schools or a children's ward in a hospital. The inherited trust that once accompanied the ordained ministry, the lack of accountability at parish level and the absence of any kind of supervision or monitoring of clergy in parish appointments, has led to a clerical isolation with potential for exploitation and abuse. Once trust is undermined in the public perception, credibility is eroded, relationships are strained and are cautiously held at a clinical distance.

One of the most frequent instances of conflict emerges, for example, with people 'shopping around' for a sympathetic priest when it comes to discussing the spiritual, practical and pastoral consequences of divorce, separation or same sex partnerships. The refusal of communion to those who are trapped in complicated relationships is not always cut and dried.

Pope Francis presented a challenging example recently when he related how a woman came to a parish to have her baby baptised, only to hear, 'no, you are not married'. Francis went on to relate how a couple came to a priest to arrange their wedding but before being congratulated they were told how much it would cost and asked for their baptismal certificates. 'Too many times', according to Francis, 'we are faith checkers, instead of faith facilitators'²⁹⁷.

²⁹⁶ Kung, H., *The Catholic Church, A Short History*, The Modern Library, New York, 2001, p.211.

²⁹⁷ Pope Francis, weekday homily, Rome, 25th May, 2013.

Clergy appointments are now much more difficult because of the significant reduction of personnel and trying to match a particular priest's talents with the parish to which he is assigned. Some clergy are masters of adaptation and make the system work as best they can. Others who are appointed to a particular parish, which perhaps has a troubled history because of various internal issues, may simply have to adjust to the culture of the status quo because to challenge it may well generate substantial opposition and even hostility. Change will happen in time but it needs to be generated from within the system rather than imposed from a newly arrived priest who is perceived as an outsider. Mutual acceptance, integration and cohesion take time to evolve.

It is obvious from the clergy interviews that once an appointment has been made, there is very little follow up as to how the newly appointed priest is getting on with the assignment. The diocese seem to have considerable resources available and deployed in various pastoral directions. Yet the human contact that would generate an actual person-to-person conversation between the priest and someone assigned to monitor his 'settling in' seems to be absent from a particularly strategic area of pastoral ministry. Given the sensitive nature of the appointment, the multi-cultural environment of the South London parish and the future development of the ecclesial community, there is a case to be made for the development of a monitoring system that would discreetly accompany every appointment, at least in its initial stages.

The isolation of the clergy may well be partly derived from the system of priestly formation. Students for the priesthood are sent to a seminary for six years of training and then assigned to parish communities. Although every student is allocated pastoral placements for experience and the seminarians are evaluated by those responsible for their formation, responsibility and accountability are perceived by some people as cushioned or diffused until a permanent placement is actually secured.

The Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests articulates a partnership for priests working in ministry with lay people: 'Priests should be willing to listen to lay people, recognise their experience and competence in the different fields of human activity. In this way they will be able to recognise along with them the

signs of the times'²⁹⁸. This document seems to encourage a co-responsibility for mission. Evidence from the interviews and questionnaire indicates, however, that this is not always the case.

Other Pastoral Issues

There were a number of other pastoral issues raised in this project but I have chosen not to explore them in any detail because they did not feature prominently. They emerged as instances and isolated remarks but they are nevertheless important because they belong in the broader context of pastoral theological reflection. They are, however, significant enough to be categorised and flagged up as supplementary issues which would certainly have a role in the infrastructure and implementation of any planned pastoral evaluation process.

1 Finance

This emerged in Question 6 in the context of experienced challenges. The point was simply made that poor income strangles everything and allows very little room to manoeuvre. The point was also made in one of the interviews that because of the lack of transparency, most parishioners have absolutely no idea of the running costs involved in parish life. Even when a parish AGM is held, the same faces show up and the task of spreading awareness and responsibility becomes futile because of the same repetitive annual audience. There is a case to be made of finding a way to inform and educate the whole community of the inner financial workings of the parish plant. People will never take responsibility effectively unless they fully understand the whole parish story.

2 Hospitality and Welcome

This emerged in question 11 when respondents were asked to comment on how successful their parish is at welcome and integration. People are encouraged to register in the parish but then there is no consequential follow up. Names exist on paper but they are mere statistics. This has a direct bearing

²⁹⁸ *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 1965 #9. .

on community integration and cohesion, given the multi-ethnic composition of the community in South London. One respondent described this as a 'lost opportunity'²⁹⁹. There is a deeper question about the new arrival; do they want to be welcomed and drawn into the intricacies of parish life? Some people prefer to remain at the parish frontier. Who takes responsibility for welcome? Is it the priest or everyone?

3 The Perception of Prejudice

In question 6, respondents wrote that 'some people are not ready to receive new faces' and 'sometimes good and holy people stand in the way of building up the Kingdom. They form a power mechanism that is detrimental to involvement'. People's perception is sensitive and clearly some respondents experienced some negativity at the parish door. 'Changing attitude is hard. The committee names may change but the underlying possessiveness is still there'. Parishes can easily establish a culture of exclusion where new arrivals find their access hampered or blocked. Question 15 records some experiences of rejection; 'I was not accepted as a candidate for the permanent diaconate. I felt dismissed'. Question 6 relates; 'I was asked to step down from youth work because of complications in my marriage. I was no longer considered a good influence'. Some casualties of parish life are inevitable but they are difficult to reconcile in the Body of Christ image.

4 Resistance to Change

From question 6 another challenge to ministry was apathy and resistance to change. One respondent recorded the experience of trying to resolve 'resistance to my leadership'. Another said that they 'hoped to join the choir, but felt unwelcome'. 'In receiving Holy Communion, why is the priest preferred to the lay person?'. All these comments reveal another side of parish life and time. While many people rejoice and celebrate the life giving opportunities their parishes provide, there is a darker side at work which will also play a part in the on-going conversation about the understanding of ministry and the formidable challenge of parish growth and development.

²⁹⁹ Question 11.

Summary and Conclusions

The 10 main findings are significant foundation stones for any parish community to consider as part of a wider pastoral evaluation or review. The 4 last issues would certainly share the same agenda. Collectively all these themes reflect a living Church that is in touch with its environment, aware of its potential and committed to living out the *Missio Dei* in the world. It does require however, a long term vision and strategic plan to harness the synergy that is clearly present.

4.6 The Future of this Research Stewardship – a Bridge to Parish Development

Having explored the understanding of ministry among five Roman Catholic parishes in South London, the various issues emerging could well be seen as permanent pastoral ingredients which will remain a constant challenge to the unfolding ecclesiological story. These issues are however, highly significant building blocks of parish life, community discernment and faith development. The people of the parish remain the number one resource. This project has shown that the people in parishes are quite open to meet, reflect and articulate their views. There is evidence of personal witness, commitment of leadership, valuable pastoral experience and an appreciation of communication, transparency and accountability. They also welcome the opportunity of new challenges that might take them beyond existing frontiers.

Having sought their opinions and listened to their views, I now wish to consider the concept of Stewardship as a possible way forward for this project. Stewardship requires a people of vision, people who have the ability and imagination to envision what the parish can be like when all the gifts and charisms are valued and engaged in the service of God's reign. 'As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace' (1 Peter 4:10).

To set the context for considering Stewardship, it is worth noting that in his recent exhortation to the Church, Pope Francis extended an extraordinary invitation to parishes:

Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: “We have always done it this way”. I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities. A proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory. I encourage everyone to apply the guidelines found in this document generously and courageously, without inhibitions or fear. The important thing is to not walk alone, but to rely on each other as brothers and sisters, and especially under the leadership of the bishops, in a wise and realistic pastoral discernment.³⁰⁰

Parishes are not used to receiving such bold invitations and many people are still trying to discern exactly what the Bishop of Rome has in mind. However when we combine this invitation with the New Evangelisation and in the context of Stewardship, new possibilities begin to emerge for the parish community.

The New Evangelisation invites us to create new ways of presenting the Gospel in the complex world of the 21st century. Stewardship³⁰¹ (an American model of church introduced by the US Bishops’ Conference in 1992) is worth considering as one definite response to that challenge. However, in order to explore the possibility of stewardship, parishes, and their leadership teams are required, like true disciples, to be courageous, visionary and willing to step out into unknown and largely uncharted territory. For stewardship to work in the local church, both clergy and laity must be willing and able to share the big pastoral and practical issues of trust, responsibility, ownership, development and accountability.

While David Heywood talks about reimagining ministry, Thomas O’Meara talks about the charism of the Spirit finding its voice in ministry and Vatican II provides an idealistic ecclesiology of parish, Stewardship introduces a spirituality of grace that clinches and networks all ministry in the service of Mission. The value of Stewardship for parish purposes is that it invites everyone to recognise their own gifts and cherish the gifts of all. Stewards of God’s gifts, however, ‘are not passive beneficiaries’³⁰².

³⁰⁰ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #33

³⁰¹ Stewardship, A Disciple’s Response, A Pastoral Letter on Stewardship, US Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1992.

³⁰² Ibid p.43

Stewardship is a way of life, a recognition that all things come from God. Stewardship is a way of living out our discipleship in the parish community and in the world. It creates an atmosphere for enabling and empowering the people of God, both lay and ordained to share responsibility for Mission. Establishing the project initially is hard work because people are asked to commit to a different way of being parish. To depart from known and familiar pathways and enter into a different ecclesial trajectory requires faith, trust and a willingness to engage with a different parish life-style. Experienced stewards acknowledge that the transition from maintenance to mission, from where we are to what we are challenged to become, may not be in everyone's DNA. Some parishes tend to assume a comfortable flight path and stewardship has a real tendency to disturb the comfortable.

Parishes are not renowned for strategic planning or long term investment in their future. They tend to evolve and sway according to the ecclesial view of the priest entrusted with their care. In a parish committed to stewardship, parishioners are no longer just collaborators with the clergy but they are actually engaged in co-responsibility for the *Missio Dei*. It is good stewardship practice to have one, three, five or ten year goals for the whole parish community. An annual review of these goals identifies what has been accomplished and provides the opportunity for the whole community to re-focus the vision. This accountability factor strengthens the credibility of the stewardship process. Among the key areas for evaluation are the spiritual, liturgical and ministerial dimensions of parish life. These elements provide an extensive network of involvement, participation and growth. The social, financial and structural hinges of parish life are also significant areas for attention because they challenge the inherited and parochial routine which in some cases has become predictable, stale and ritualistic.

Many parishes operate on a shoe-string budget and struggle to provide adequate facilities for their communities to grow. Stewardship opens the challenging door that our shared future depends on every member of the community taking some responsibility for development. It is highly likely that many people in our parishes are totally unaware of the specific financial details that shape and dictate our current status. If transparency is part of the parish package, the absolute necessity of planned giving and fundraising is perceived

and understood in a shared context. When consumerism is replaced by ownership, and people know they belong, a very different model of parish is born. Awareness and education are vital first steps to transformation.

The concept of stewardship takes time, patience and effort to introduce and consolidate. It is not a cosmetic quick-fix or surface exercise. Stewardship is a challenge to engage in a fairly extensive overhaul of the parochial system that has dictated and shaped parish practice for generations.

The pastoral implication of stewardship is that both priest and people are willing to embrace and establish, a more pastoral procedure of systemic openness, collaboration and community development. There is a dual challenge here for the priest letting go of inherited power and the people recognising their opportunity, right and privilege to become more active participants in the Body of Christ. Once the vision is owned and operational, the people of the parish are empowered to live out their Baptismal calling and the priest is set free to celebrate the ministry for which he is actually ordained.

Many parishes already implement the hallmarks of stewardship but they may not see themselves through the stewardship lens. Many of the stewardship elements already exist in the parish. Stewardship is a word that organises all the various parish elements and provides a spirituality to explain why we do what we do. The realisation that the whole parish is a learning community highlights the necessity of effective communication at the heart of the stewardship parish. Identifying the needs of the people, offering them a sense of prayer, belonging and hospitality goes a long way to bringing stewardship to life. Welcome and hospitality are key steps to relationship building. Educating the community about the whole parish jigsaw is a foundation stone for progress.

Fundamentally, stewardship is a process of growth into the life, teaching and person of Jesus of Nazareth. Following the example of Christ, stewardship is an idea which slowly infiltrates into the heart and infrastructure of parish life. It changes the culture which takes parishioners on a journey from being consumer members to active participants. The Eucharist remains the cornerstone and compass for the entire journey. A key component of the stewardship journey is the realisation that everything in life is sheer gift. We are sacred recipients and custodians of God's revelation, grace and life.

Conclusion

Parish Ministry: Servant of Mission What is the Understanding of ‘Ministry’ in today’s Church with particular Focus on 5 Parishes in South London?

A primary aim in this project was to understand the life of the local Church with a view to enriching its quality of practice. To achieve this, I identified and explored the significant pastoral constituents of Church, parish, charism and mission that collectively influence and shape the local Church

I carried out an empirical investigation among key people from five local parishes to ascertain their understanding of ministry as experienced practitioners in their own local parishes. I used qualitative and quantitative methods to record their responses and analyse the results. Insights gathered from a committed cross-section of parishioners, offered a genuine voice of pastoral practice and experience. Listening to the needs of the context informs new questions and ‘there is no limit to the distance a question can travel’³⁰³.

The response to the empirical exercise was frank and informative. Because participants spoke with the voice of experience and had the security of anonymity, they were quite forthcoming with their views and insights. The interplay between the framework of theological themes in Chapter 2 and the empirical data in Chapter 3, produced an informative, interdisciplinary dialogue of pastoral and practical significance.

In Chapter 4 of the study, I identified and extrapolated the essential pastoral themes and priorities that emerged from the whole exercise. The pastoral and practical implications emanating from the key findings; the Sunday Liturgy, adult formation, communication, the recruitment and formation of catechists, the young Church, identifying the needs of the people, issues of isolation and power, and the move towards an inclusive inter-cultural Church, collectively form a healthy challenge and invitation to the Church authorities of today.

There is no doubt that all of these extrapolated themes carry a significant message because they are all directly concerned with the life of the parish, the

³⁰³ O’Donohue, J., quoted from the launch of his last book *Benedictus* at Catford, November 2007.

challenge of evangelisation and the direct involvement of priest and people in handing on the faith to the next generation.

To pastorally engage with the ten emerging themes from this project would be a substantial challenge for any parish community. Yet, these themes are all present in some embryonic form in every parish in the land. Looking forward to the next phase of this project, I introduced the idea of Stewardship as a possible bridge to parish community development. The value of Stewardship is that it provides an accessible ecclesiology and a pastoral starting point for parishes to consider. The idea of celebrating the gifts of time, talent and treasure among the whole people of God in the community is an attractive and manageable exercise which could lead to other pastoral developments.

An important insight, underpinning all these issues, is the value of a group of parishes, such as a the local Deanery working together to share best practice and enhance existing pockets of pastoral activity. The inherited and traditional system of every parish trying to meet every pastoral need is long obsolete. Knowing and realising that local resources can be shared is a liberating moment for ministers as well as for mission. There is also an appreciation that working together on these themes fulfils a key aspiration of Vatican II :

The faithful should live in the closest contact with others of their time, and should work for a perfect understanding of their modes of thought and feelings as expressed in their culture. They should combine knowledge resulting from the new sciences and teaching, and from recent discoveries, with Christian morality, so that they will succeed in evaluating and interpreting everything with an authentically Christian set of values³⁰⁴.

This theme was articulated by John Paul II in one of his apostolic letters:

'It is not therefore a matter of inventing a "new programme". The programme already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfilment in the heavenly Jerusalem. This is a programme which does not change with shifts of times and cultures,. but it must be translated into pastoral initiatives adapted to the circumstances of each community³⁰⁵.

³⁰⁴ *Gaudium et Spes* #62.

³⁰⁵ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Inuente*, 2000. #29.

This section concludes the study in the conventional sense of drawing it to a close. In Chapter 4, the theoretical perspectives and the empirical data of the study have been processed, inter-related and 'conclusions' in a logical sense have been drawn. The research began with a question. This work has provided (1) light on the question and (2) more questions.

As well as the possibility of exploring Stewardship, there is case to be made for further research on some alternative method of formation where both lay and ordained personnel could share formation for ministry and equally contribute to a vision for the local Church. Preserving the inherited system of priestly formation simply sustains the perception and practice of isolation. The New Evangelisation calls for the discernment of new ways to proclaim the Gospel in the 21st century. Perhaps this invitation also extends to acknowledging the need to discern candidates for leadership in the local Church, both male and female, who would engage in pastoral formation alongside those preparing for ordination or religious life.

In the long term, the value of lay and ordained people experiencing formation for mission together, would sow more challenging seeds for a future Church that would have a shared emphasis on communion, co-responsibility and accountability for mission. Perhaps the challenge and invitation of the Bishop of Rome to the Church in Brazil on the priority of formation, should be viewed and interpreted through a universal lens:

'Courage is needed to undertake a thorough review of the structures in place for the formation and preparation of the clergy and the laity of the Church (in Brazil). It is not enough that formation be considered a vague priority, either in documents or at meetings. What is needed is the practical wisdom to set up lasting educational structures. The present situation calls for quality formation at every level. Bishops may not delegate this task. You cannot delegate this task, but must embrace it as something fundamental for the journey of your Churches'³⁰⁶.

³⁰⁶ Pope Francis, 28 July, 2013. [Meeting with the Bishops of Brazil in the Archbishop's House of Rio de Janeiro - 7.27.13](#). Accessed 24 August 2013.

APPENDIX 1

Letter of Approval from the Archdiocese of Southwark



THE MOST REVEREND PETER SMITH, LL.B., J.C.D.,
ARCHBISHOP OF SOUTHWARK,
ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE, 150 ST. GEORGE'S ROAD, SOUTHWARK, LONDON SE1 6HX
TEL: 020 7928 2495 FAX: 020 7928 7833

19th October 2010

Fr. John Mulligan,
St. Teresa's Church,
250 Bishopsford Road,
Morden,
Surrey,
SM4 6BZ

Dear John,

Thank you for your letter of the 14th October and for the copy of your "Evaluation", which I received at the weekend. I haven't had time to read it properly, but I will do so in due course.

I am very happy for you to approach four parishes in the Merton Deanery and I hope they will give you their full co-operation with your research and likewise the Seminaries which you hope to approach as well.

If I may make one comment on the "Questions to consider", I wonder if the second one isn't rather a leading question, and if you were to leave out the "How" and make it a simple, objective question, that might be better in terms of conveying the objective nature of your research. It is only a suggestion - I suppose it must be the lawyer in me coming to the fore!

If I can be of any further help, or if you would like to come and have a chat about your research, please do not hesitate to let me know, and I'm sure we could find a mutually convenient day and time for a chat - but no pressure on you to do that.

With an assurance of my prayers and good wishes,

R.C. DIOCESE OF SOUTHWARK
A REGISTERED CHARITY No: 235468

APPENDIX 2

Letter of Approval from the Research Ethics Panel

John Mulligan
Department of Education & Professional Studies
27th July 2011



Dear John,

REP(EM)/10/11-70 – ‘What is the Understanding of ‘Ministry’ in today’s Church with particular Focus on 5 Parishes in South London’

I am pleased to inform you that the above application has been reviewed by the E&M Research Ethics Panel that FULL APPROVAL is now granted.

Please ensure that you follow all relevant guidance as laid out in the King’s College London *Guidelines on Good Practice in Academic Research* (http://www.kcl.ac.uk/college/policyzone/attachments/good_practice_May_08_FINAL.pdf).

For your information ethical approval is granted until 26th July 2013. If you need approval beyond this point you will need to apply for an extension to approval at least two weeks prior to this explaining why the extension is needed, (please note however that a full re-application will not be necessary unless the protocol has changed). You should also note that if your approval is for one year, you will not be sent a reminder when it is due to lapse.

If you do not start the project within three months of this letter please contact the Research Ethics Office. Should you need to modify the project or request an extension to approval you will need approval for this and should follow the guidance relating to modifying approved applications: <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/ethics/applicants/modifications.html>

Any unforeseen ethical problems arising during the course of the project should be reported to the approving committee/panel. In the event of an untoward event or an adverse reaction a full report must be made to the Chairman of the approving committee/review panel within one week of the incident.

Please would you also note that we may, for the purposes of audit, contact you from time to time to ascertain the status of your research.

If you have any query about any aspect of this ethical approval, please contact your panel/committee administrator in the first instance (<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/ethics/contacts.html>). We wish you every success with this work.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Butcher
Research Ethics Administrator

APPENDIX 3

Information sheet for Questionnaire Research Participants

Kings College Research Ethics Committee Ref

Title of study

Ministry – Servant of Mission

What is the Understanding of ‘Ministry’ in today’s Church with particular Focus on 5 Parishes in South London?

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to read carefully the following information and understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. You should only participate if you want to and you are free to withdraw at any point without explanation. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish.

What is the purpose of the study?

This thesis will focus on the level of awareness and understanding of ministry in the service of mission among 5 Roman Catholic parishes in South London. The empowerment and active participation of lay people in the parish community is essential to its mission. The project will include empirical exploration and analysis in order to discern the theological level of understanding of ministry and mission at local parish level.

Why have I been chosen to participate?

I am looking for people who are involved in the life of their parish community. If you are under 18, you cannot take part..

What will happen if I take part?

If you choose to take part you will have to complete a short questionnaire.

Sample questions: How did you get involved in the life of the church? What aspect of parish life do you serve? How are you encouraged to use your gifts? What resistance, obstacles or barriers are experienced? What is your greatest challenge at local pastoral level? What pastoral structures best enable you to recognise, cultivate and celebrate your gifts? How can your gifts be engaged to their full potential? How do you actually understand your ministry in the local church?

It will take you about 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

What are the possible benefits?

Participation in the study may make you more aware of; (a) the value of working in a community, (b) the opportunity you have to share your gifts, (c) the support that is available to you, (d) the impact that your work has on the broader community.

Will my personal data be kept confidential?

All your responses are given anonymously and cannot be traced back to you in any way. Your confidentiality will be assured at all times and you will not be identified in any publication. Information retrieved for the purpose of the study will be stored anonymously for two years..

Who is organising and funding the research?

The study is part of my DThMin research at Kings College, London. This study is reviewed by the College Research Ethics Committee of Kings College London. The study is privately funded.

Contact for further information

The principal investigator for this study is John Mulligan., Department of Education and Professional Studies. This is part of a DThMin project, supervised by Professor Alister McGrath Alister.mcgrath@kcl.ac.uk and Dr Philip Barnes, Philip.barnes@kcl.ac.uk Department of Professional and Educational studies. Should you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in the study please contact me by email: john.mulligan@kcl.ac.uk

APPENDIX 4

The Questionnaire for Parishioners

What is YOUR understanding of Parish Ministry today?

Parishes are served by ordinary people who make a significant contribution in sustaining the life of the parish community. This survey is an attempt to identify some of the reasons behind your motivation. It is also an invitation to articulate your needs so that better support may be provided. A primary aim of this project is to understand the life of the parish with a view to enriching its quality of practice and impact. Your answers will be anonymous and the result of this survey will help the parish to plan for the future.

Please answer all the questions as fully as you can. It will take about 20 minutes.

Thank you.

MINISTRY

1 How did you first get actively involved in the life of your parish?

e.g. (Newsletter invitation, introduced by a friend, invited by the priest, personal initiative, parental or family influence, other)

.....
.....

2 What is your ministry within the parish? *(e.g. Catechist, Reader, Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, Parish Pastoral Council , music, youth, cleaning, welcome, sacristan, RCIA team member, Children's Liturgy Leader, Sacramental Preparation Team Member, Not involved, other)*

Please indicate If you are involved in more than one.

.....
.....
.....

3 What pastoral training, if any, have you received in relation to the work you do in the parish? (please circle)

a. None

b. Some

c. A lot

4 What kind of formation / training would you value most?

.....

.....

.....

5 What do you understand by ‘ministry’?

.....

.....

.....

6 What kind of challenges (*resistance, obstacles, barriers*) to your ministry have you experienced in your parish? *Please give an example if possible and how you would suggest overcoming the challenge:*

.....

.....

.....

.....

Please tick if no challenges are experienced

7 To what extent if any, does your ministry influence:

your work life? Please explain.

.....

.....

your family life? Please explain.

.....

..

.....

...

PARISH

The section on parish is meant to identify and name the challenges experienced in parish life now. It is also an opportunity to articulate your vision of what the parish might become.

8 How much of your time (hours per week) do you dedicate to your parish? (please tick)

- ☐ 1 hour per week or less
- ☐ 1-3 hours per week
- ☐ 3-5 hours per week
- ☐ Over 5 hours
- ☐ Other.

9 What, in your experience, are the greatest challenges in your parish today? Please indicate 3 from the following:

Welcome, Adult Faith Formation, Recruitment and Training of Catechists, Communication, the Young Church, Outreach, Ecumenism, Working Together, Celebrating Diversity, Identifying the Needs, Other

1.....

2.....

3

10 Which parish ministries should receive priority?

Choose 3 of the following ministries and put them in order of parish priority:

RCIA, Youth activities, lay involvement, the Sunday liturgy, clergy involvement, clergy delegation, the role of the Parish Pastoral Council, welcome, music, school, prayer, social engagements, multi-cultural events, other.....?.

1.....

2.....

3.....

11 How is your parish successful in welcoming and integrating new parishioners?

.....

.....

12 What do you think helps to build community in your parish?

.....

.....

13 What are the big concerns as you look to the future of:

(a) your Parish?

Please select 3 of the following:

reduction in Mass provision, loss of a permanent priest, formation of lay people for leadership roles, involvement of young people, outreach to elderly and bereaved, sacramental preparation for children and adults, loss of community spirit, opportunity for more people to be involved, financing a Parish pastoral Worker, manipulation of power, other

.....

.....

.....

(b) your Deanery?: *(the Deanery is the local group of parishes)*

Please select 3 of the following:

amalgamation of parishes, lack of access to clergy, communication, the challenge of working together, exclusion of people, networking catechists, engaging with a different model of church, financing a Deanery Pastoral Worker, other

.....

.....

.....

14 How many years have you been involved in your parish ?

- ☐ less than one year
- ☐ 2-3 years
- ☐ 3-6 years
- ☐ 6-10 years
- ☐ 10+ years

Gifts

This section on GIFTS is meant to draw out ways in which pastoral responsibility and leadership can be shared by ordained and lay people working together.

15 Can you tell me a story about something that has happened to you which illustrates how you feel your gifts were valued or not valued in the parish? Use a separate sheet of paper if required.

.....

.....

16 Demographic Profile

Age range 18-24 ☐ 25-44 ☐ 45-64 ☐ 65+ ☐

Gender Male ☐ Female ☐

Please indicate your area of residence:

- ☐ South London area
- ☐ Outside South London

What is your ethnic / cultural group?

please tick:

- ☐ Black or Black British – African
- ☐ Black or Black British – Caribbean
- ☐ Black or Black British – other
- ☐ White British.
- ☐ White Irish.
- ☐ Asian or Asian British – Indian
- ☐ Asian or Asian British – Pakistani
- ☐ Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
- ☐ Philippines
- ☐ Sri Lanka
- ☐ Polish
- ☐ Chinese
- ☐ Other

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.
Please return it by email or regular mail by **31 May 2012**.

If you would like to take part in an interview – and discuss your views further – please contact:

John Mulligan, St. Teresa's Church, 250 Bishopsford Road, Morden, Surrey, SM4 6BZ

Tel: 020 8648 4113

email: johnmulligan1@hotmail.co.uk

Thank you for your time

APPENDIX 5

Information Sheet and Consent Form for Interview Participants

Title of Study:

Ministry – Servant of Mission

**What is the Understanding of ‘Ministry’ in today’s Church with particular
Focus on 5 Parishes in South London?**

Please complete this form after you have read the information sheet and / or
listened to any information about the research.

Kings College Research Ethics Committee Ref

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide it is
important for you to read carefully the following information and understand
why the research is being done and what it will involve. You should only
participate if you want to and you are free to withdraw at any point without
explanation. Please take time to read the following information carefully and
discuss it with others if you wish.

What is the purpose of the study?

This thesis will focus on the level of awareness and understanding of ministry
in the service of mission among 5 Roman Catholic parishes in South London.
The empowerment and active participation of lay people in the parish
community is essential to its mission. The project will include empirical
exploration and analysis in order to discern the theological level of
understanding of ministry and mission at local parish level.

Why have I been chosen to participate?

I am looking for people who are involved in the life of their parish community. If
you are under 18, you cannot take part..

What will happen if I take part?

If you choose to take part you will be invited to an interview where you are
asked to discuss with the researcher aspects of your experience in parish life.
With your permission the interview will be audio recorded.

Sample questions: How did you get involved in the life of the church? What
aspect of parish life do you serve? How are you encouraged to use your gifts?
What resistance, obstacles or barriers are experienced? What is your greatest
challenge at local pastoral level? What pastoral structures best enable you to
recognise, cultivate and celebrate your gifts? How can your gifts be engaged to
their full potential? How do you actually understand your ministry in the local
church?

It will take you about 45 minutes to complete the interview. The venue will be at
a mutually agreed location.

What are the possible benefits?

Participation in the study may make you more aware of; (a) the value of working in a community, (b) the opportunity you have to share your gifts, (c) the support that is available to you, (d) the impact that your work has on the broader community.

Will my personal data be kept confidential?

All your responses are given anonymously and cannot be traced back to you in any way. Your confidentiality will be assured at all times and you will not be identified in any publication. Information retrieved for the purpose of the study will be stored anonymously for two years..

Who is organising and funding the research?

The study is part of my DThMin research at Kings College, London. This study is reviewed by the College Research Ethics Committee of Kings College London. The study is privately funded.

Contact for further information

The principal investigator for this study is John Mulligan., Department of Education and Professional Studies. This is part of a DThMin project, supervised by Professor Alister McGrath Alister.mcgrath@kcl.ac.uk and Dr Philip Barnes, Philip.barnes@kcl.ac.uk Department of Professional and Educational studies. Should you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in the study please contact me by email: john.mulligan@kcl.ac.uk

INFORMED CONSENT

Please check the relevant boxes after you have read the Information Sheet.

I agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be treated in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Please tick

☐

I understand that if I decide at any time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and withdraw from it immediately without giving any reason.

I agree to the interview being audio recorded. **Yes / No**

Thank you for considering taking part in this research.

Please complete the form:

Researcher's Statement:

I, John Mulligan, confirm that I have carefully explained the nature, demands and circumstances of the proposed research to the volunteer.

Signed:

Dated

Participant's Statement

I, ... agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written above and the information sheet about the project and understand what the research study involves.

Signed:

Dated:

APPENDIX 6

The Interview Questions - RBT INTERVEIWS 2012

Parish Ministry: Servant of Mission

‘What is the Understanding of ‘Ministry’ in today’s Church with particular Focus on 5 Parishes in South London’

1 MINISTRY

What do you **understand** by parish ministry? How would you explain it to a new arrival in the parish?

2 PARISH

- A. How did you first get involved in the life of the church?
- B. What is the **greatest challenge** facing the parish today?
- C. Looking to the future - there is great concern about the loss of a permanent priest, reduction of Masses and amalgamation of parishes.
 - a. What kind of **issues** does this highlight for you?
 - b. Are there any obvious solutions?
 - c. Why e.g. have we less priests?
 - d. Do you see a **different model** of church/ parish emerging ?
 - e. In parish life – what should have **top priority**.

e.g. Communication, (2) Catechesis & formation of lay people, (3) Awareness, (4) Young people. (5) Celebrating Diversity. (6) The Sunday Liturgy. Other ? Please give reasons.

- D. How can we move from *collaboration* and maintenance to a sense of **ownership & responsibility** for our parishes?
- E. How can we make the parish more **relevant to young people**?
- F. What helps to **build community** in parish life?
- G. Is there a role for cyber space communities, chat rooms, blogs, etc
Will the digital presence replace the real presence?

3 GIFTS

- ❖ How can people be encouraged to offer their gifts?
- ❖ What’s missing from parish life in general?
- ❖ Is there anything else you would like to add?
(on or off the record)

Thank you for your time.

Appendix 7

Sample Interview Text

INTERVIEW 1

What do you understand by parish ministry? How would you explain it to a new arrival in the parish?

When I read that question I thought, in a way that's a question in two parts, because how I would understand it would be one thing and how I might explain it to somebody else would depend on the person, because I would want to sort of use their language as it were, but, I see parish.....first of all, I have a bit of a problem with the word parish because I think that parish.....it's a bit like school, it's a bit.....sort of...damming down, and I see ministry as the baptized persons response to the call of Jesus to follow him and to live out the Christian life, which includes.....which includes the whole mission of the church. So, I see it as just that which a person does in response to the call that they have from God as a result of their baptism. If somebody, if I, if somebody came along and I was trying to explain it to them, I mean the parish bit I see as, it just happens to be that we are in the parish. I think that parish can be belittling, where as, I'm a director of education for parish service, and I've been trying to stretch that, so that its education for.....**the greater mission**, yes exactly, and.....the parish as part of the diocese is the whole church, somehow there is the sense that the parish is....not where at all happens as it were, where as, parish as part of the diocese is the whole church in reality, and so that's where you really come to know God and to commune and communicate, commune with God and communicate God.

How did you first get involved in the life of the church?

I was brought up baptized as a baby, as a Catholic. I moved house when I was 6, so I have sort of pre six memories, and my pre six memories are of.....knowing God and knowing about God being the most exciting and most important thing in my life. So that's what started me off.

What is the greatest challenge facing the parish today?

This one I sort of struggled over because there are so many challenges, but I think, the greatest challenge is overcoming the structure, which I think is impossible at the moment, I think the whole structure of the Catholic church is geared towards dis-function. I think that patriarchal systems, hierarchical systems of the sort that we have in the Catholic church.....are destructive of everybody they're not good systems.....and in the parish.....the absolute power as it were of the priest in the parish is.....the biggest obstacle to the mission of the church I think.

Looking to the future, there is great concern about the loss of a permanent priest, reduction of masses and amalgamation of parishes. What kind of issues does this highlight for you?

I'm not sure what you mean. Ok, for example, a lot of young people are concerned that if they lose a priest and the parish, or if Masses are reduced and so on, and you have clustering of parishes, what does that say to us about the church structure itself, and following on from your previous response, does that kind of suggest to us that the structure is wrong or that it is limited in someway, are there any obvious solutions?, like what have we less priests for example?

Ok, again its.....there's why its happening and is there a different model emerging. Why it's happening is because, in my view, because of this structure that we have, which is incredibly difficult to change, it's a bit like the last sort of huge big despotic regime in a sense, and if we look at what's happening throughout the world, the sense of accountability, the sense that you don't just do what you're told by authority without questioning and then being accountable. That's your sort of problem, that's associated with huge ingrained sexism , and that's a huge problem. When it's a question of coming down to parish level and what's going to happen, that's such a big question..... I used to think that.....we.....in a sense it was a sort of good thing because not having so many priests enable laity to take on more roles. My sort of fear now is that there is such.....i don't know whether this is the answer to the question.....but the problem that we have with the church, is our bishops, our bishops don't.....first of all I said it was our priests.....now I'm saying it's our bishops, but what they don't do, and the obvious reason why they don't do it is because they are being picked for this very reason that they won't do it....but what they don't do is to.....defend their flock in a way that they should, so that, if you just take the English language translation, all the bishops worldwide of the English speaking countries had decided that.....the translation was good and they sent it to the Vatican for a rubber stamp, and the Vatican said 'no' they are not having it, now the English bishops throughout the world could have said "sorry, we have agreed this and we are having it", because it was an abuse of power from the Vatican to.....none of those people would impose something that goes against all of what's gone before, so what we don't have, at all levels, episcopal level, clerical level, lay level, is.....standing up against the abuse of authority, now I can't even remember what the question was, **different model of church**. What worries me now is that there will be a split really. I used to think that we could gradually change.....I've been in the same parish for 42 years, and I have seen its slow decline, and there have been times, like 10 years ago, 20 years ago, that I was sort of hopeful that out of the ashes as it were, something good would emerge. My sense is that we have got to such a bad state that.....that we need to really.....a bit like an alcoholic.....we are going to need to go further and further and start again and something new has got to arise, so I don't think now, that I know what the future, make up, may be. However, my experience here, I've been the director for 4 years, is that, for the first time in my life I think, I've experienced here what I think a parish community should be like, and so perhaps, it's in communities like this that seeds of what will come in the future.....and I've lost the grammar of that but I think you know what I mean.

Coming back to parish life again, what do you think should have top priority in a parish agenda? Should it be communication?, or formation for lay people and catechesis?, should it be awareness?, should it be young people?, should it be celebrating diversity? Or the Sunday liturgy?, but what do you think should have top priority? There is so much going on and sometimes we try to address so much that we miss the essential. What would you put at the top of the agenda?

I think, none of those, I think it depends on your parish.....like.....and it's a question of.....I don't think you can say all parishes should put this at the top of their agenda. All of those things that you mention portioned. You've only got so many resources and you are going to have so many obstacles as well, and

you have to listen to the Spirit and you have to test out your ideas, and you have to.....go with, you have to discern really where you are being led in each parish rather than saying this is what you should do, or that's what you should do, and above all.....the two things that really matter, one is respecting the positions of the other person, so that I'm saying the new liturgy is an abuse of power by the Vatican which I sincerely hold, but that doesn't mean that I will go to my church and say that I am not using the liturgy, so there is a.....there is a respecting of the other persons position and the value that they are bringing to whatever you are doing, and there is a sort of communal hearing of the Holy Spirit and we being led and co-operation and just humility and those sorts of things, that's what's needed in the parish.

How can we move from collaboration and maintenance to a sense of ownership and responsibility for our parishes?

It's terribly difficult that..... I think that people want to take ownership but they are blocked. Now having said that, some of the people that want to take ownership should be blocked. I mean the solutions are difficult, I think that there is a lack.....one of the big problems is the lack of trust so that parishioners don't trust the clergy, clergy don't trust the parishioners and the way in which clergy are set aside and educated on their own, and you are supposed to have this respect for them so you don't actually speak what you feel or if you do, you've got so cross that your bloody rude, that's the problem, and the answer needs to be honest, proper dialogue between priests and people, and that's the only way you are going to have co-ownership. There is no trust.

How can we make the parish more relevant to young people?

Again two levels, the first level is the structural thing. Young people do not go along with sexism and homophobia which the church seems to be totally engrossed in, so there is that whole thing to deal with which is huge. The other thing is that they have to be made, they have to belong and be welcomed and we have to accept that we don't consider to be good behavior, and we have to give them jobs, not give them jobs. They have to be included in what is going on, so that it is their church, it's not ours and we let them do a bit.....it's theirs and they have to run the ship a bit.

With our last priest, the children were always young people who were coming in and throwing candles across the church, and our priest sort of set up this war with these young people, and he was writing things in the newsletter about them and they were taking the newsletters, and the more he was writing, the more they were taking the newsletters, and they were coming in and throwing the candles, but they were coming in. Now, we need to say "good you are in" and we need to talk to them, but his idea is to get them out and it's that respectability versus young people who aren't conforming to our perception of what is respectable. **So, maybe the real challenge here is a change of mind set?.** Yes.

What helps build community in parish life?

Welcoming, social activities, but not social activities.....get rid of the Catenians !.....it's so interesting, my experience of our parish has been that.....organizations work against community, it's like divide and rule, and the people that don't belong, I can remember one priest saying to me "well you don't have a say and you don't belong because you don't belong to any of

the groups” and that you only fulfill your life to the parish through the group, which means that people who don’t fit in, don’t belong to a group.....are excluded. So, all groups, we should get rid of same sex groups, that’s the answer to your young people, and, now what’s the question again, sorry?,

How to build community and what are the ingredients?, yes, inclusiveness, inclusivity and.....lack of hierarchy really, like you’ve got your priest and then you’ve got your deacons, and then you’ve got your visiting deacon, or something, then you’ve got your married Catholic families with Catholic children who go to Catholic school, then you’ve got your families where one is a Catholic and the other parent isn’t a Catholic, then you’ve got your people coming to church and they’re not in a proper marital relationship according to the church, and so you’ve got all of these valuing people differently according to their status. Now that has to be wrong, Jesus is about going out to the wastrels, they have as important a place in the church and they have to be included, I’m not sure how many I’ve got to now. And, you need social events. The social events need to be the same sort of social events you would have outside church, like if what you do with your friends is go for a meal and a glass of wine, then having biscuits and tea is not good enough. We need to put as much effort into our socializing at church as we do outside church as it were.

Is there a role for cyber space communities, chat rooms, blogs etc. Will the digital presence replace the real presence?

It’s got to, hasn’t it. **It’s the language of the future?**. I wouldn’t use that phrase. One of the things, I’ve just been up to Northampton to try and encourage people to come down here to our foundation degree, and what I am saying is that, there are loads of places you can go to, not loads, there are places that you can go to that are distance learning and what we are holding onto is face to face meeting, and the university.....validated by St Mary’s, are saying that we have got to go to blended learning which essentially is distance learning, and all our staff and the students that we have are not in that at all, because it is in the face to face contact that that’s where your community is, but having said that, the church has really got to get its act together with regard to.....technology so that when you go to a place you can stick your thing in and it comes up on the screen, so that I’ve copied down all of the email addresses of the priests in this diocese who have email addresses, and loads don’t, all of them need an email address, they need to be able to use the email and they need to be able to feel confident about it and be taught how to use it and be willing to use it.

How can people be encouraged to offer their gifts?

Its.....the crucial thing is that if you ask somebody to do something, that you sort of trust them to do it, so let them have.....well a free hand, although obviously you would have some sort of overseeing role but you would let them do it, but the other crucial thing is that you give them a small chunk of something to do, but they can do without feeling, if I do this, I am going to have to do that, that and that, and I am going to be stuck with it for the next 50 years. The other side of that.....i think that people have huge gifts, they want to use, this is more my experience, they want to use and are not enabled to use them, and I think, for me that is the real tragedy actually, that they are just blocked, I mean I could give you tones of examples of that,

sure, but the enabling is the critical factor, to actually invite, could clergy be sort of encouraged to sort of invite people to offer their gifts?, it's a communication thing really isn't it?

I was thinking that only recently, I think that, it's very very hard for anybody to be rejected, so you say to somebody like you know "will you come to this?" and I might say that to 300 people, and if 20 come, I think thank goodness. But, when somebody says "no", I mean like one of my friends said "no I'm sorry to say or perhaps not that day I'll be in France" and you are thinking.....ahhhh when you ask someone to do something and they don't do it, you feel very dejected, so it's very hard I think for clergy, or anybody really, you have to be able to learn to ask when the answer "no" is ok, so, do you want to do that?, oh ok, you don't have to without them feeling bad or you feeling bad, and that's a very difficult thing to do I think, **but its an important insight?**, there is another thing about asking..... Yeh its not minding if they say no, **but leaving the door open for a future time?** Our priest says people won't volunteer because they are not....there is a big thing going on about commitment, this is the big word, people won't commit, now people would commit if you said now look, come in four times in a year, but our priest says "well if you don't come in every week when I want you too, you are not committed". You have to recognize that at the same time you are saying to these people, "look I want you to be good families, I want the family to be the place where you bring your children up, the domestic church where you are a shining light as a family", you can't do that if the child is, I don't know in a ballet dance class or something, and you have to choose church over ballet and you've got to choose church, you see it's a question of , when you want people to be committed, it has to fit in with their lifestyle. Now that isn't to say that secular things comes first and church comes second, but you have to value their role in the secular world, that is where they have their mission, and that has to be respected and valued, and things like going shopping, "oh well they are all at Bluewater and don't come to church", Bluewater is....its a good thing, you have to value what is going on outside and not see that as it's the church or it's the secular things.....i think.

What's missing from parish life in general?

Fear. Fear and distrust, **you mean they are missing or they are too blatantly there?** Missing, oh wait a minute, fear is there. Forgiveness, reconciliation.....forgiveness and reconciliation. Scrap my other answers, that's what is missing really, and a willingness to be reconciled. I don't know, it's like people ask me in the street and I agonize for ages because another day I will say something else.

Is there anything else that you would like to add?

I think I have been giving you my "and" factors. Is there another one?..... I think.....I think that there is a lack of trust in God. Jesus is, you've seen all things and greater things will you do.....what does that mean?..... that means us! We don't really believe that and if you sort of say that, no no it doesn't mean that.....there is a lack of belief that you can move mountains or that God will lead you. So one thing that concerns me is, I'm highly critical of the church structures, highly critical of the way clergy are educated and the way in which.....I mean overall.....highly critical of the sexism in the church, it's just horrendous, but, and sort of talking about that it's got to sort of collapse,

but, I haven't really talked, because it's much easier not to, about the good that is there, so I'm not pessimistic, although it is sounding as if I am.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME

Appendix 8

**Table of Interview participants:
Summary of background information**

Interview	Denomination	Gender	Age	Education	Profession	Country of origin
1	R/ C	Female	50+	PhD	Director	UK
2	R/C	Female	50	MA	Head Teacher	UK
3	R/C	Male	45	MSc	Director	India
4	R/C	Male	55	Degree	Teacher	UK
5	R/C	Male	45	Degree	Ordained	Malta
6	R/C	Female	40	Degree	Lay Chaplain	Malta
7	R/C	Female	35	Degree	Teacher	UK
8	R/C	Male	70	Degree	Social Worker	UK
9	R/C	Male	65+	Degree	Retired teacher	UK
10	R/C	Male	60	Degree	Ordained	UK
11	R/C	Male	50+	PhD	Lecturer	UK
12	R/C	Female	44+	MA	Lay Chaplain	UK

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