

Parish of St John the Baptist Clontarf Survey 2018

Introduction

In September 2018, Archbishop Martin wrote to the priests of the diocese asking them to carry out a consultation on how best to foster a renewal in the Church following on from the visit of Pope Francis as part of the World Meeting of Families. Five questions were posed by in the letter:

1. Why are we no longer captivating so many of our young people for the message of Jesus Christ?
2. Which models of pastoral activity and reflection are most likely to win the hearts of young people for the message of Jesus?
3. How do we teach young people about prayer?
4. How can our parishes respond to these challenges?
5. Which aspects of our dominant culture make it harder for people to understand the message of Jesus?

It was clear from the letter it was not necessary to stick rigidly to the five questions, rather, that it was up to each parish to decide how best to address the issue.

Parish Response

The Parish Pastoral Council in St John the Baptist, Clontarf, decided to establish a sub-committee to consider the issue and formulate the response from the Parish. The sub-committee proposed surveying four different groups of people:

1. Parents of children Baptised in the Parish in 2017
2. A sample of Parents of 4th Class children
3. A sample of Transition Year students
4. Parishioners.

The rationale for this was to be sure that we solicited the opinions of younger people and their families as these are the key groups of interest. The sub-committee also agreed that the survey for groups 1, 2 and 3 would be limited to three open questions, tailored to suit the group being surveyed.

This approach was approved by the PPC. The survey was issued at the end of November and responses were received by early December. The table below sets out the number of surveys issued to each of the four groups and the number of responses received.

Surveys	Parents of Children Baptised in 2017	Parents of 4 th Class Children	Transition Year Students	Mass attendees
Issued	57	39	60	300
Returned	9	24	54	27
Response Rate	16%	62%	90%	9%

Data Analysis

As the survey resulted in free form responses it was necessary to find commonality between the answers received in order to present some analysis of the responses. The summary of this analysis follows.

Sample Survey Cover letter common across all groups surveyed:

Pope Francis recently came to Ireland as part of the World Meeting of Families. For some, this visit was a joyous occasion that had immense significance. For others, it was irrelevant.

As a parish, we would like to reflect on the visit and the role of the Church in people's everyday lives so that we might build on our community spirit following that visit. To do this, we are asking a number of different groups to help us by giving us their frank and honest thoughts on a few questions.

We could limit our survey (overleaf) to those who attend Church regularly, but we also really want to understand the views of those who do not attend or feel alienated from the Church, for whatever reasons. Whether you are a regular attendee or not, please be assured that your response will be totally anonymous, so we would ask you to be brutally honest. We would ask you to return the survey, in an envelope marked (St John the Baptist Survey), to your teacher, by Thursday 29th November.

Thank you for taking the time to complete our survey. We will use the results to try and make our parish more responsive to the needs of our parishioners.

Parents of Children Baptised in the Parish in 2017

Last year, you, along with many other parents, asked to have your child baptised in our Church. When this same group of parents were invited to a follow up celebratory liturgy, the attendance was less than we would have hoped for.

Question 1: It would be useful to us if you could help us to understand the reasons for this?

		Attended		Was unable to attend but would		Other	
Number of replies	9	1	11%	5	56%	3	33%

Question 2: What connection have you had with the Church since your child's Baptism?

		Some Connection		No Connection	
Number of replies	9	7	78%	2	22%
Connection referred to					
Regular attendance at Mass and other services		2	29%		
Attendance at events - Christmas/Easter/Funerals/Weddings/Baptisms etc.		4	57%		
Other		1	14%		

Question 3: What could we, as a Parish, do to make the Church more attractive to you?

		Suggestions Made		Reason for lack of connection given		Happy the way things are	
Number of replies	8	2	25%	4	50%	2	25%
Suggestions included							
More interaction with Children		1	20%				
A children's Choir		2	40%				
Involving teenagers from local schools		1	20%				
Social events in parish centre		1	20%				
Reasons for lack of connection							
Age of children and difficult keeping them quiet in Church				3	75%		
Pressure on working parents				1	25%		

Parents of 4th Class Children

Two years ago, your child made their First Holy Communion and in two years' time they are due to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. We would like to understand the significance of these Sacraments for you and your child.

Question 1: What relationship has your family had with the Church since your child's First Holy Communion?								
	Little or no relationship			Some relationship		Not Stated		
Number of replies	24	3	13%	20	83%	1	4%	
Nature of relationship								
Attendance at Mass				19	95%			
Other				1	5%			
Attendance at Mass								
Regularly				13	68%			
Occasionally				4	21%			
Not specified				2	11%			
Participation at Mass by those that attend regularly								
Altar Server/Reader/Choir				7	54%			
Not specified				6	46%			

Question 2: What could we, as a Parish, do to make the Church more attractive to you and your family?									
	Number of responses that included a								
	Positive		Negative		Suggestion		Other Comment		
Number of replies	24	11	39%	2	7%	12	43%	3	11%
Comments related to									
Mass				2	100%				
Family Mass		5	45%						
Other		6	55%					3	100%
Suggestions related to									
More Singing						4	33%		
Shorter Mass						3	25%		
More interactive Sermon						3	25%		
Shorter Sermon						1	8%		
Community events						3	25%		
Refreshments						2	17%		

Question 3: Will you be asking for the Sacrament of Confirmation for your child in due course?							
	Yes		No		Probably		
Number of replies	24	22	92%	0	0%	2	8%

Transition Year Students

Your relationship with the Church and God has predominantly been influenced by your family. As you grow in independence you are becoming more aware of the control you have in deciding on your own involvement in your Parish and Church life.

Question 1: How relevant are the teachings of Jesus Christ to your everyday life?							
		Not Relevant		Somewhat		Very Relevant	
Number of replies	54	35	65%	12	22%	7	13%
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Nature of relationship							
Guideline or Code				7			
Other				12			
						37%	
						63%	

Question 2: What Parish activities have made a difference to you?							
		Number of responses that included a					
		Positive		Negative		Suggestion	
Number of replies	52	19	34%	35	63%	2	4%
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Comments related to							
Baptism/Communion/Confirmation		10	53%	3	9%		
Mass		2	11%				
Charitable/Community events		6	32%				
No difference made		1	5%	28	80%		
Lack of Information				2	6%		
Other				2	6%		
Suggestions related to							
More Information						1	50%
More Activities						1	50%

Question 3: What could we, as a Parish, do to make the Church more attractive to you?									
		Nothing		Suggestion Made					
Number of replies	51	17	33%			34	67%		
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Suggestions related to				Parish / Church		Mass		Activities	
				21	48%	17	39%	6	14%
Institutional issues									
Inclusivity (LGBTQ, Women)				11	48%				
Modernise				7	30%				
Deal with scandals				2	9%				
Other				3	13%				
Changes to Mass									
Shorter						9	39%		
More entertaining						7	30%		
More music						3	13%		
Other						4	17%		
Activities									
Bible Group								3	50%
Charitable/Community/Social								3	50%

Parishioners

Question 1: Why, in your opinion, are we no longer captivating so many of our young people for the message of Jesus Christ?

Because of ...

Church Scandals and image of church as wealthy and dominant	10
Parents not practicing faith and lack of faith in the home	7
Poor quality sermons	5
Busyness of life of parents and children	3
Influence of Internet and Social Media	3
Anti Church bias in media	2
Many attractions and distractions for young people	2
Lack of follow up after Holy Communion and Confirmation has lead to lack of understanding of faith among young people	2
Ignoring the voice of women	1
Need to move away from telling people how to live and concentrate more on the personal and communal benefits of religion	1

Question 2: What should we be doing in the parish to attract young people?

Involve young people in Social Justice projects	3
Evangelize and teach catechesis - run Alpha Course or study of Pope Francis' "The Joy of the Gospel"	3
Provide a silent and prayerful atmosphere in the Church	2
Make the faith relevant to everyday life	2
Have a parish mission	2
Put up a big banner outside the church which welcomes all age groups and a sign that tells of the children's Mass	1
Invite those who attend at Christmas and Easter to come back once a month and promise fast Mass and short	1
Sermons should not exceed three minutes	1
Homilies should recognize the pressures young people are under	1

Suggestions: Wayside Pulpit, Presidents' Award, Taizé, Rosary, Blessed Sacrament, Pro-Life Group, Music, Fun events, guest speakers, engaging with young people

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Question 3: What aspects of the culture of today make it harder for people to understand the message of Jesus?

Impact of modern technology and social media	6
Culture of individualism and self-gratification	5
Past scandals	4
Hostility in the media to the Church	4
Peer pressure	3
Busyness of people's lives	2
Role of sport	1
Inability of Church to help people's faith to develop	1
Today's culture has very little emphasis on the message of Jesus	1
People don't hear the message of Jesus in the home or the school	1
Life has changed over the years	1

Suggestions: PPC members and parishioners to do a retreat over a year, promoting Youth 2000, Parish Mission, engage a professional communications group, concentrate on benefits of religion, proclaim the truth and not a watered down version of the Gospel

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