

**A report on the results of the survey of parishioners in the Archdiocese of
St. John's**

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Acknowledgement

I wish to thank the people of the Archdiocese of St. John's for taking the time to complete this survey. I also thank them for their patience with me while I analyzed the data and created the report.

I thanks Fr. Steve Courtney and Ms. Anne Walsh for their patience with and faith in me to produce this document. I hope that they, and the Archdiocese find some guiding inspiration within its pages.

I wish to thank Dr. Bev Fitzpatrick and Susan Ryan for their reading of the report. Their comments were helpful.

Special acknowledgement must be given to Peng Yu. Peng was one of our graduate students who laboriously and generously converted the handwritten responses on the paper copies into electronic format. He diligently and carefully retyped each survey into a form that could be analyzed using the qualitative data analysis software.

For the greater glory of God through Jesus Christ who is love.

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Appendix A. Data codes and frequency counts by survey question. Error!
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Q1: What is a positive experience you have had with the Roman Catholic Church?
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Q2: What is the Roman Catholic Church/Archdiocese/Parish doing well? Error!
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Q3. How do you feel welcome or at home in the Roman Catholic Church/Archdiocese/ Parish?..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Q4. What is a negative experience that you have had with the Roman Catholic Church/Archdiocese/Parish?..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Q5. If you could change one thing, what would you change about the Roman Catholic Church? Error! Bookmark not defined.

Q6. What is one thing the Roman Catholic Church could do to increase your faith or spirituality? Error! Bookmark not defined.

Q7. What could the Roman Catholic Church do to make it more meaningful for you? Error! Bookmark not defined.

Comments Error! Bookmark not defined.

Appendix B: Categories and sub-categories of revised coding scheme..... Error!
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The Archdiocese Survey

The participants

Approximately 10, 000 surveys were distributed throughout the Archdiocese, and parishioners in each parish were asked to complete a survey. They were also asked to take additional copies to give to others, such as family members, friends and co-workers. In particular, they were asked to give a survey to someone they knew who was "estranged" from the Church or did not attend Church on a regular basis. One parish asked the congregation to complete the survey during mass; the other parishes left it to individuals to complete on their own. Surveys were also placed at hospitals in St. John's. Completed surveys were returned by mail, dropped off at the parish office or put in the weekly collection. The survey was also available online at the Archdiocese website; a special e-mail address was created to which participants could send their responses.

Table 1. Location of respondents by parish, geographic region, and urban-rural location.

Parish	Region		U/R	
Basilica	6	Burin	43	Urban 604 (83%)
Corpus Christi	8	Conception Bay	20	Rural (111) 15%
Good Sheppard	31	Conception Bay South	9	Other (9) 2%
Holy Family	1	Goulds	2	Missing 123
Holy Rosary	1	Mt. Pearl	35	
Holy Spirit	1	Northeast NL	1	
Holy Trinity	2	Northwest NL/Lab	1	
MQP	1	Paradise	16	
MQW	2	Portugal Cove/St. Philips	8	
Sacred Heart	1	SE Avalon	29	
St. Agnes	2	St. John's Central	200	
St. Edward	2	St. John's Downtown	50	
St. Francis	12	St. John's North	99	
St. Joseph	1	St. John's Northwest	92	
St. Michael's	2	St. John's South	20	
St. Patrick's	3	St. John's Southwest	6	
St. Paul's	14	Torbay	38	
St Pius X	14	West Avalon	48	
St. Teresa's	123	Other (not in Archdiocese)	7	
Other	5	Missing	123	
Missing	611			

Table 2. A summary of age and sex of survey respondents.

	F	M	Couple	Unspecified	Total
Not specified	13	4		37	52
Lt 35	34	24			58
36-55	150	68			218
56-70	231	91	1	5	328
Gt 70	113	67	1	5	186
Total	544	255	2	46	

Of the surveys distributed, 847 responses were received. Using information provided in the responses (e.g., naming their parish or priest) it was possible to identify 19 parishes with people who participated. Table 1 presents the breakdown of participation by parish, region (determined from postal code), and urban-rural nature of the region (based upon postal code). Because so few parishes could be identified, and a significant number of surveys had missing postal codes, meaningful analysis at the parish and regional levels was not possible.

Most participants chose to respond using paper format. There were 702 surveys submitted using the printed form, while 146 were completed electronically. This may be due, in part, to the fact that parishioners in one parish were asked to complete the survey during mass. Statistically, electronic submissions were more likely to come from younger parishioners than older ones ($\chi^2=60.02$, $df=4$, $p<.0001$), and those who lived in rural areas ($\chi^2=19.80$, $df=2$, $p<.0001$).

Table 2 provides a summary of age and sex of the participants. The preponderance of respondents was female (68%), and over 55 years of age (63%). Most attended mass on a weekly (78%) or daily basis (12%). Eighty-seven of the respondents indicated a willingness to participate in a focus group.

A small handful of people chose to respond by submitting essays rather than directly answering the questions asked. In these instances, the essays were carefully read, main ideas identified and treated as reflecting the appropriate question from the survey.

The process

Participants' responses were analyzed using QDA Miner, version 4.1.23 (Provalis, 2014). Each survey received was converted into a format that enabled the QDA Miner software to decipher the text. The hand written responses of individual paper submissions were typed into a Microsoft Word template while responses from electronic submissions were copied and pasted into the template. Each survey was saved as a separate document that was imported into the QDA Miner database.

Because the survey asked seven specific questions, the data analysis plan was to analyze responses and establish themes for each question. For each submission, each question was read to develop an overall sense of the response. This was followed by a breakdown of the response into units of analysis, which Rennie et al. (1988) called meaning units. A meaning unit refers to a phrase or sentence that expresses a single idea (Dupuis et al. 2006), which Fischer and Wertz (1979) referred to as "a distinguishable moment in the overall experience" (cited in Halling 2008, p. 163). To establish meaning units, responses were broken down into words or phrases conveying participants' thoughts or feelings about their experiences. These meaning units were given labels (or codes) which were clustered into categories and sub-categories (Ryba 2007).

This process resulted in 821 different codes being established which were organized into 29 categories and 83 sub-categories. The codes, sorted by survey

question, are presented in Appendix A. The categories and sub-categories are presented in Appendix B, Table 3 and Figure 3.

Reaction and response to the survey

The response to the survey was varied. On the one hand, 103 people (12.2%) did not answer any questions or only one question. It may be that some simply had little or nothing to say. It could also be because the survey presented difficulties for some parishioners, as one respondent pointed out:

- This is a poorly designed survey. I know several who attempted to complete it, but gave up. [631]¹

On the other hand, 561 (66.2%) parishioners answered five, six or seven of the questions, and there is some indication that the survey was received in positive light. Eighty-four participants commented on the survey. Parishioners welcomed the opportunity to be able to voice their concerns and express their opinions on issues of importance to them. A sample of these comments includes the following:

- I believe this survey is a brilliant initiative and I truly hope that something comes from this. [395]
- I am so grateful to the Archdiocese for encouraging this feedback by the faithful. This is a revolution in itself. To hear from the customer would not be revolutionary for any other organization. But for the Church of Rome, emphasis has always been given to the clerical point of view, always with an appeal to authority, rather than exploration. [470]
- Thank you for this opportunity to comment. I can't recall ever being asked for this type of input! God bless. [445]
- It is wonderful to see this survey and to feel like I have a chance to share my voice. Thank you. [818]
- It is wonderful to see the Church/Archdiocese/ parish provide people with an opportunity to vocalize and speak about their feelings regarding Church. I think this is a positive step towards welcoming people to/back to the Church. Thank you! [640]

However, skepticism was also apparent. Several respondents were concerned that their efforts were futile and that nothing will come from the results:

- I would be curious as to how the Archdiocese is actually going to collate and use all the information they are attempting to collect with this. [381]
- Nice idea. I am frankly not optimistic that positive change will ensue. There's too many dinosaurs in the priesthood and I am not referring to their age. Attitudes desperately need to change. Also wondering if there will be a report – will you be transparent with the responses you've received? [57]
- Just wondering if this survey will [be] acted upon. I remember assembly and all the work that went into that – nothing ever came of it. [515]

There are expectations that steps will be taken to effect change, and that there is an obligation to take action:

- I believe this survey is a brilliant initiative and I truly hope that something comes from this. [395]

¹ Each survey (respondent) was given an identification number. The number in the square brackets represents the identification number of the participant who made the statement. For example, this particular quote came from the respondent who completed survey number 631.

Also, there were comments about the shortfalls of the survey, including the sample. The idea was expressed that the people who should really respond are those who don't attend church:

- Unfortunately, I don't think it reaches the people you need to hear from. That is the people who don't go to church. You can't talk to people who have no ears. [443]
- The survey is a nice step, but we are gathering info from who? The people who are going to church or who access our web site. We need to reach the broader church community as well. [875]
- This questionnaire should be sent to homes of non-practicing RCs. I don't know how receptive it would be. [372]

In many cases, the questions elicited strong and explicit opinions. Many parishioners were not afraid to speak their minds and voice their concerns. Most often, these opinions were positive and supportive:

- Lifts my spirits during troubled times and in general, I feel so much better spiritually after attending mass. [261]

However, at times the opinions were disparaging. For example, some did not feel welcome and were not afraid to say so:

- The Roman Catholic Church is not welcoming, or at least my parish isn't. [804]

Likewise, some respondents were not afraid to voice their opinion about the Church and its teachings. For them, the Church was not a credible institution:

- The shameful handling of the child abuse cases, hiding the truth, moving child abusers is a failure of faith and Christ's teaching. I no longer see the church as an authority in moral matters I feel I must make my decision based on my own interpretation of Christ's teaching and my own life experiences. [448]
- The RC Church generally does not have a good connotation in my opinion. I am not proud to call myself Catholic at all times. [201]

Looking at the seven questions asked.

In this section of the report, I have provided a general summary of the five most common responses to each of the seven questions. A more elaborate explanation is provided in a later section.

Parishioners were asked seven open-ended questions:

1. What is a positive experience that you have had with the Roman Catholic Church?
2. What is the Roman Catholic Church/Archdiocese/Parish doing well?
3. How do you feel welcome or at home in the Roman Catholic Church/Archdiocese/Parish?
4. What is a negative experience that you have had with the Roman Catholic Church/Archdiocese/Parish?
5. If you could change one thing, what would you change about the Roman Catholic Church?
6. What is one thing the Roman Catholic Church could do to increase your faith or spirituality?

7. What could the Roman Catholic Church do to make it more meaningful for you?

What is a positive experience you have had with the Roman Catholic Church?

In general, participants had a positive view about the Church and their experiences. For them, attending mass was critical but a diversity of responses were given, ranging from spiritual blessings to administration and leadership, to community and fellowship (see Appendix A). Seventy-six unique codes were used to categorize their responses. The five most frequently reported positive experiences were:

- participating in sacraments
- receiving support and care
- participating in mass
- gathering together
- everything was good.

The most common positive experience parishioners reported was the participation in a sacrament or ritual. Being married in the Church, attending the baptism of a child, or the funeral of a loved one were moments that were important and positive experiences in their lives, especially if the experiences transcended generations. As examples:

- I was baptized in The Roman Catholic Church. I also made My First Holy Communion and was confirmed there. [903]
- [I] Was married there – all my children were married there and their children baptized in the church service of my children. [270]
- My marriage; children's christening; children's 1st communion. [275]

Participants also reported that receiving support and comfort during times of difficulty was a positive experience. This support, often provided by clergy, was provided in numerous life situations, including illness and death:

- When I was dealing with my husband's illness and death, my parish priest and clergy were a great support to me and my family. [841]
- In time of need my church has provided pastoral care. No questions asked. [71]

But support was also given for comfort in traumatic or stressful situations, such as miscarriage, or divorce:

- When I lost my baby the pastoral counseling at the Health Science was very supportive. [20]
- Healing following and during my divorce. Non-judgement. [260]
- When I was experiencing a relationship break up the church (priest) was there to listen. It helped very much. [551]

It was also reported, as a positive experience, that pastoral counselling was available and given during times of confusion or uncertainty:

- Could speak to clergy in personal & spiritual problems – not feeling judged. [568]
- A priest was available when I needed to talk to them. It helped a lot. [396]

When asked to provide a positive experience, many respondents simply replied "Sunday masses" [78], "folk masses" [763], or "attending daily mass" [641]. That is

to say, the mass itself is an intrinsically positive experience. Some were more explicit:

- Mass is usually a positive experience. [903]
- I find that Mass is a central part of my faith and celebrating it weekly gets me through the week. [893]

However, other parishioners went further to state that being involved in a ministry at mass was a positive experience and source of satisfaction:

- I have been privileged to participate in many ministries. [172]
- Getting involved with the different ministries has been very positive & has enriched my life. [27]
- Totally enjoying being a lector. [99]

For many, gathering together as a family and community is a positive experience from which they draw joy and satisfaction. For some, being able to attend mass with family brings immense joy. For others, the parish provides a sense of community. For example:

- Feeling part of a community; having the opportunity to build relationships with people with the same core values. [948]
- I have enjoyed a sense of community and a sense of belonging to a large supportive family. [726]
- Family gathering & Grandchildren. [581]
- Being with my family and God's family. [379]

Many respondents did not single out any particular experience, but commented that everything was good:

- I appreciate everything the church does for everybody it does great. [233]
- I think my parish is doing a lot of things well. [691]
- From what I can see this parish is a wonderful parish. [210]

However, not everyone described a positive experience. As mentioned earlier, many surveys were returned blank, or with only one or two questions answered. Some parishioners were more frank, explicating stating that there were no positive experiences (n=15). Some reasons include scars from past scandals, perceived inequality or ill-treatment, and lack of spiritual fulfillment. Some comments include:

- I never had a positive experience with the RC Church. [840]
- A long time since I have felt very positive about my experience of Church. [615]
- There has been no positive experience for me since Mt. Cashel. [907]
- I am not challenged. I am not fed. [865]

A number of other experiences were mentioned, albeit less frequently, as positive experiences. These include:

- participate in missions, retreats or pilgrimages
- participation in devotions such as Marian devotion
- being steadfast in the teaching of the faith
- growing up Catholic and having the family grow up Catholic

What is the Roman Catholic Church/Archdiocese/Parish doing well?

Based upon the responses of surveys, there are things the Church does well, but clear areas of improvement are evident as well. Ninety-two unique codes were

created for categorizing responses. The five most common responses to this question were:

- the bishop or priest is friendly and doing well
- the parish is welcoming
- the mass
- involvement
- outreach programs.

The most frequently cited thing the Church is doing well is having priests who are seen as friendly, helpful and supportive. The priest is a significant figure and represents the face of the Church to many parishioners, and many perceive the priest in a positive light:

- The priests are warm friendly and share God's word with reflection and for thought. [182]
- All priests are kind, approachable & friendly. [100]
- The priests make us all feel welcome. They are there for you in the good times and difficult times. [600]

In addition to friendly and supportive priests, many respondents felt their parish to be friendly and supportive, creating a feeling of community. They felt their parish was doing well at being a welcoming place:

- When you come to this parish, you feel very welcome and happy to hear the mass from such warm people. [284]
- Very friendly and welcoming atmosphere. [285]
- Our archdiocese and parish is inviting and welcoming to all in attendance. You feel at home in our parish. [640]

The mass was singled out as something that was well done. Respondents appreciated that mass was available at different times, and working to ensure that it was an enjoyable experience was recognized and appreciated:

- Our parish works hard to make mass a very interesting and enjoyable experience. [593]
- Offering mass at multiple times during the day and during the week. Offering youth mass at ... is a blessing. [818]
- Providing the sacraments, most especially the Eucharist. [895]

Getting people involved in the life of the parish, was acknowledged by respondents as something that was being done well. While involvement typically referred to participation in a ministry, it also extended to involvement in catechism, sacraments, and managing the parish. That is to say, the people are the life of the parish:

- My parish is doing very well at engaging the congregation and the various ministries in masses and the work of the parish. [866]
- Its effort to involve parishioners in the various committees / duties is commendable. [950]
- Encouraging members of congregation to be more involved in helping out the church by volunteering his/her time & talent. [513]
- Lots of committees, ministries, children's programs, choirs, ... [920]

Being able to offer outreach programmes was something participants saw their parish and the archdiocese as doing well. These programmes, which often function because of volunteers, served the poor and needy, those in need of spiritual direction, or aiding people confronting challenges in their life:

- Ministry to the sick, elderly, dying, and the living. [519]
- The corporal works of mercy – feeding & clothing the poor, helping single parents etc. [617]
- The archdiocese in general and our parish in particular seems to be doing a very good job with its different outreach programs. The gathering place, programs for children, food banks, chaplaincy programs or hospitals and similar institutions. [616]

Several people (n=10) expressed dissatisfaction with their parish, or the Church at large and had a negative opinion of the things the Church was (or wasn't) doing:

- Almost nothing. [65]
- All the people are not treated equally. News Flash?! We don't like that. [730]
- Honestly, not a lot.. [865]
- Sorry to say, but not much. You seem oblivious to the issues of our times. People are dealing with serious drug addictions, alcoholism, poverty etc. but I don't see it ever addressed in the church. If it is, it's done so quietly that not even those who need support, help or direction are even aware of it. [927]

A breakdown by geographic region showed that these parishioners were located throughout the Archdiocese and not concentrated in one particular area, implying that no individual parish was being singled out.

In addition, parishioners felt that the Church was doing well at fostering a relationship with God, being supportive, and being friendly while promoting unity and fellowship. Teaching the faith, having relevant homilies, the music, being inclusive were also seen as being done well.

How do you feel welcome or at home in the Roman Catholic Church/Archdiocese/Parish?

Participants provided answers that generated 69 unique codes in response to the third question. Many responses centered upon the community part of the Church; others made reference to the spiritual benefits of attendance. The six most common answers of how they feel welcome are:

- feel welcome
- friendly priest
- friendly parish
- greetings
- openness to volunteers

A significant number of respondents reported that they felt welcome in their parish, and there were some reasons for that. For some, it was emotional – a feeling of warmth, joy, or community. For others, it was the security in the universality of the Church:

- Welcome and at home are definitely words I'd use. [260]
- I feel at home in every Roman Catholic Church building I walk into. [533]
- I certainly feel at home in my parish where there is a sense of community. [616]
- There is love and joy the moment I step inside the door. [142]

The parish priest was singled out as playing a significant role in making people feel welcome. Being friendly, supportive and relating to the congregation was important. However, being present at the beginning and end of mass was particularly appreciated:

- The priests of this parish relate to all parishioners regardless of community status. [187]
- The parish has a sociable priest who appears to care in a sincere way. I believe people notice this. [188]
- Having the priest to welcome you at the door going and coming, being friendly. [298]
- Priest greeting on entering and leaving mass. [321]

In addition to a friendly priest, a friendly parish was a significant component to feeling welcome and at home in the parish:

- Everyone is so friendly and it makes you feel at home. [231]
- This church is like one big happy family. [207]
- The parishioners are friendly. [276]
- It's where I attended all my life, and the people, parishioners are kind and willing to help each other when needed. [436]

Having greeters is an important part of building a friendly parish. Being greeted at the door when coming to and leaving from mass was identified as something that contributed to feeling welcome. Additionally, being greeted by other parishioners in general contributed to feeling welcome:

- We're always greeted warmly before and after every church service. It fosters kinship among all the parishioners. [29]
- Being greeted in a warm and friendly manner before and after mass. [183]
- Parishioners who nod or smile and shake your hand with the love and peace of Jesus. [195]
- I am greeted. [142]
- We are greeted at Sunday Mass. [20]

Becoming involved in the life of the parish was identified by some as a means of feeling welcome and at home. What is interesting to note is that it isn't necessarily the participation that creates the feeling of belonging, but the invitation to become involved:

- I am involved in my parish so I feel very welcomed. [886]
- I feel at home in my parish through singing – the shared experience allows us to develop close relationships within the choir. [897]
- We are invited both as a group and individually on occasion to be involved in the ministries of the church. [945]
- [I]nvited to become involved in different ministries in our church. Some are very welcoming and encourage people to get involved. [20]
- I tend to feel welcome to participate in leadership types of initiatives at the parish level. [824]

Not all respondents felt at home, or that their parish was welcoming. Reasons cited ranged from feelings of alienation, perceived inequalities which exclude groups (e.g., other denominations or religions), interpersonal relationships or disagreements with teachings. For example:

- In our church there is not much of a welcoming sense by either the clergy or the congregation. I do not feel welcome in my own parish. I stopped going because of that feeling. [893]
- Never a mention made to recognize newcomers. [628]
- Sad because I understand too many people are excluded. [743]
- I don't want hypocrites to welcome me if I attend church. I see only the Lord my God. [907]
- I feel welcome in the way that I am amongst a group of people where everyone agrees not to talk about the 'elephant in the room.' As long as I am willing to ... stick to the Catholic minimum and political correctness, then I will be welcome. [936]

- I don't. Our parish is a one woman show. It is her way or the highway. ... People has left the parish because of her. [618]
- No, not any more. I'm divorced and looked upon by some in my parish as not deserving to be there. [865]

Also mentioned as contributing to feeling at home or welcome were feelings of togetherness and a steadfast congregation; the universality of the Church and a shared faith; the homily, the music at mass and communion; social activities. There was an expressed appreciation for Pope Francis as a role model and the messages he proclaims.

What is a negative experience that you have had with the Roman Catholic Church/Archdiocese/Parish?

When asked to describe a negative experience with the Church, the single most common response was "none," that respondents had no negative experiences (n=187). In fact, not only did parishioners say there was nothing negative, many emphasized the point that their experiences were positive:

- I have had no negative experiences in the Catholic Church. It has been very positive experiences in the fifty years attending church. [152]
- Haven't had any negative experiences; always felt blessed. [153]
- None. I am so happy just being in the church and being greeted by patient parish priest. [81]
- Personally, I have not had any negative experiences. The Church has always been there for me and my family. [931]
- All my experiences have been good. [545]

This is not to say, however, that all is well in the eyes of participants. There were 134 different codes used to capture the negative experiences reported (see Appendix A); the five most frequently cited are:

- past abuse scandals
- negative interactions with the priest
- the role of women in the church
- Teachings that are strict and rigid
- The homily

The past abuse scandals and how they were handled, were singled out as the dominant negative experience of participants. The incidents which took place deeply affected everyone, causing great harm to many, and the (mis)handling of the affairs created mistrust and hurt. Some of the comments of respondents convey the pain that ensued:

- The scandal of Mt. Cashel and the other abuses really affected me. I did not have my son confirmed because of that. [11]
- The sexual abuse that has happened within the Church has been very disheartening for me. It has really impacted me. [27]
- Of course, the abuse scandal will always hurt me. [501]
- Abuse by clergy has and still is having a very negative effect on people. [2]
- Being ashamed of the cover-up of the abuse, ashamed of the people who did it. [51]
- Not dealing effectively with the problems related to sexual abuse. [205]
- Although great strides have taken place, it took the church too long to address the significant issues of the past. This has disillusioned many and distracted from the good workings of the church. Things have improved and been added but will never be forgotten by some. [239]

If a group of parishioners described their relations with the priest as positive, many felt otherwise. A group of respondents provided anecdotes describing events or exchanges with priests that were negative. Often, the priest was described as not relating to people, not providing good leadership, being mean or cruel, or unaccommodating.

- Priests that still have the high and might attitudes that look down on the people and do not attempt to relate with the common people. [893]
- Priest out of touch with reality, priest feel parishioners are providing a service however priest is providing a service, priest see themselves as “the church,” priest still have absolute power, they can veto, overturn any decision made by a committee. [892]
- All-knowing and bullying priests holier than [thou] attitudes. [602]
- The priest was impatient with a baby who was crying. The parents (I think) left mass. [291]
- A very controlling, rigid, often cruel priest in parish while growing up. [462]
- The priest we currently have is, in my opinion, the most unaccommodating, unsympathetic, odd man I have ever met. [800]

A number of negative experiences were not necessarily experiences, but opinions expressed about the teaching and rules of the Church. The most common of these was the position on the role of women in the Church, and the [non]ordination of women as clergy. Objection to this idea was fairly prolific, often based upon arguments of gender inequality and the prominent role that women serve in supporting the life of the Church:

- A deep hurt arising from the way the establishment excludes the full, active participation of women. Every time I hear some ashcan say we can never have female priests, or even talk about it, I cringe. [905]
- [W]itnessing the ongoing injustices of barring women from the priesthood. [897]
- An unwillingness to promote the ordination of women, despite the fact that women are the “backbone” in most parishes. [746]
- Refused to ordain women when women are so involved in the church. [500]
- Always as a woman the second class feeling when women; the role of mother or virgin only roles acceptable or laudable. [378]

An extension of the policy of not ordaining women was the perception that much of the practice of the faith is rule-based. It was felt that applications of these rules were too strict and detracted from the essence of the faith. Several told stories about how the application of rules created a negative experience at an important time in their lives when they were looking to the Church for spiritual support:

- Church still appears to be hung up on rules and regulations. It’s about people! [185]
- Sometimes too bogged down in “rules and regulations.” [137]
- I have seen people desiring to return to God and the Church driven away by aggressive wielding of Church doctrine when welcome and gentle guidance could have returned sheep to the fold. [928]
- [A] niece of mine could not get her baby baptized in the Catholic faith because she didn’t want to take the course ... her baby was “dedicated” in the Salvation Army.
- My wife and I were given the third degree and made to feel like we did something wrong when our daughter was baptized ... very negative. [24]

A number of parishioners singled out the homily as a negative experience. They found the homilies to be too long or too boring. The homilies often simply repeated the liturgical readings and did not relate to the problems of daily living. Some of the topics were frowned upon:

- Sometimes the homily is too long – really no need. [339]
- Sermons are sometimes very boring and long relating to the Bible too much. [434]
- Homilies are not inspiring – meaningful – relevant. Insensitivity when homilies are about abortion, same-sex marriage to people in pews. [277]
- Fire and brimstone sermons. As children were afraid to commit a sin in case we went to hell. [450]
- There also seems to be a lack of effort by some priests put into the homilies. Often times trite words or repeated generalizations are all that is offered. Being the focus point of catechesis in the church, parishioners deserve more. [817]
- Sermons should include current problems and suggested solutions instead of only biblical references. [660]

A number of additional topics were mentioned less frequently as negative experiences and are noteworthy of mentioning. This included teachings on divorce and the annulment process, celibacy of the clergy, and emphasis on money. Perceived inequalities, especially with respect to homosexuality and people from other denominations, were also mentioned as negative experiences.

If you could change one thing, what would you change about the Roman Catholic Church?

When asked what they would change, if they could change one thing, a number of participants (n=70) stated that they would change nothing. Many of these participants felt the Church was doing a fine job, and that they had faith in the Church:

- I would not change anything in the Roman Catholic Church. In my opinion, I think the priests at [our parish] are doing a fantastic job [and] are the best couldn't ask for any better. They are like a family to me. [385]
- I don't see anything that I would change. It is one Holy Catholic and apostolic Church. We are members of that church and should lead by example by attending regularity ourselves and praying to the holy spirit for those who do not attend regularity. [433]
- I am comfortable with my church and my faith. [23]
- I don't think I would change anything. [492]
- I cannot think of anything that I wish to change. [242]

However, participants' responses generated 104 codes representing suggestions for changing the Church (see Appendix A). The five most common suggested changes were:

- Priests should marry
- Ordination of women
- Reach young people
- Treatment of homosexuals
- General absolution

A significant number of parishioners (n=139) felt that the celibacy of priests was the one thing that they would change, if they could. A number of different reasons were given for changing this requirement. It was seen as a way of addressing the shortage of priests. It was felt that married priests would better be able to relate to the congregation because they would have a better understanding of issues confronting parishioners. It was considered normal for a man to be, or want to be, married and was seen as a way of preventing future abuse. For example:

- Married priests ... as for celibacy, it is one way of expressing religious life and calling. But family life is just as holy and valid. [945]
- [M]arried priests because they would have a more in-depth understanding of issues and problems. [334]
- I think I would change the rule that priests can't marry. I think that a lot of men, who are spiritually guided, don't join the priesthood because they cannot be involved or have a relationship with a woman. I think it could mean more men joining the priesthood if they could marry and have children. [44]
- Permission for the priests to be married. They are human beings and need love and companionship like the rest of us. [383]
- Priests could marry. It is just the natural, human thing to do. [367]
- I believe priests should be free to marry which would go a long way to keeping pedophiles out of the priesthood. [263]

Respondents also indicated that the refusal of the ordination of women was something that should be changed (n=102). Women, they felt, should be allowed to be ordained as priests, for several reasons. In addition to being a gender equity issue, female priests would have a better understanding of families and the issues they struggle with. It would also address the shortage of priests. The following comments reflect those opinions:

- The role of women – it seems that we are ok to assist and to do menial tasks but we dare not have greater aspirations! God needs both genders to do His work. [902]
- Include the [women] in everything. They too are made in the image of God, and how dare we relegate them to 2nd class status? [905]
- It's very hard to continue to hold one's nose to the inequity in the Church between men and women. It's not right. [375]
- I think priests should be allowed to marry if they wish and also allow female priests. I think that there are many more people who would consider the priesthood if this was allowed and I think it would those who lead to be able to relate to their parishioners and their everyday struggles. [419]
- The one thing I would change would be to have female priests. I know what the pope says and supportably what the Bible says but with such a shortage of priests ... impossible to service areas outside of St. John's. [562]

Participants expressed concern for our Catholic youth (n=82). They were concerned that the youth in the Archdiocese were not attending church, and felt that much work needs to be done to attract the youth back. One particular suggestion that recurred was involvement of youth in the church, such as participation in ministries or having youth/folk masses:

- I think that it would be great if the R.C. Church could figure out a way to attract more young people. [166]
- I would like to see more things to encourage our youth and young adults to attend. [332]
- We have to reach out to our young people. How we can be more inviting to them I am not sure but we have to reflect upon this by dialoging with them directly. [891]
- We need more inclusion of the children. More social activities, etc. My daughter does not like coming to church and doesn't see the sense of it. The kids are the future and if we don't grab them now there will be no one coming to church when all the older ones are gone. They used to feel there was something for them there. They need to meet other kids. [193]
- We need to get younger people involved with our church. [28]

The theme of inequality was impetus for recommending that Church change its teaching regarding homosexuality. Some participants (n=35) felt there was an

unjust inequality present, and two themes emerged. First, a desire was expressed that homosexuals should be included within the community of the Church. Second, the Church should allow homosexuals to be married. The following is a sample of comments:

- Welcome all types of people regardless of their sexuality into the church. [807]
- Openly acknowledge and accept the various forms of sexual orientation. Be welcoming of these individuals. Don't condemn. [950]
- Acceptance of gays/lesbians in the church. They are a part of the Church community and should not be discriminated against. [183]
- I would like to see same sex relationships be accepted and part of the Church. [247]
- The full acceptance of gay and lesbian marriages. They're also human beings that are capable of great love. [29]

The fifth most common issue for change in the Church to emerge from participants' responses is general absolution. A number of participants (n=33) expressed a desire to have general absolution to be reinstated. For many parishioners, there is a desire to be absolved of sins but a distaste for having to go to individual confession. As expressed in the words of respondents:

- I would bring back general confession most people I know avoid confession like the plague and I feel it would bring some back. My wife is a good practicing Catholic but won't go to confession. I have 3 daughters; 2 of them never go to church and one goes not all the time and they all hate confession. [917]
- We would like to see general reconciliation return to the Church. It was nice when all the people get together and pray for God's forgiveness. More people would attend. [831]
- Should have general confession. Very stressful for most to go in confessional. [412]
- Bring back general absolution. I get more from it. [364]
- I would like the sacrament of confession re-instated to the general reconciliation form, like it was awhile back. I think that more parishioners would prefer that, I for one would prefer that.

A number of other recommendations of change were put forth. These included, but not limited to:

- Ecumenical unity
- Better homilies
- Divorce and the annulment process
- The role of the laity
- Altering the rituals in the mass
- Addressing past scandals
- A lack of awe and respect at mass

What is one thing the Roman Catholic Church could do to increase your faith or spirituality?

To represent the responses to the question about increasing spirituality, 97 unique codes were created (Appendix A). The most common response (n=139) when asked what the Church might do to increase parishioner's spirituality was "nothing." There were a couple of different reasons for this reaction. First, some felt that spirituality was an individual matter, a relationship between themselves and God that was not necessarily dependent upon the Church:

- My practices and faith will not change. I feel older people's religion is between them and God. [1]
- I feel good about where I am with my faith. It is up to me not the parish/archdiocese if I wish to practice my faith. [249]
- Nothing for me. I am a practicing Catholic and get solace from that. [372]
- I take care of my own spirituality. [388]
- I don't think the parish needs to do anything. I believe this is something that has to come from within myself. [932]

Some respondents felt that the Church was already working hard to increase spirituality. The Church was doing all it could, and were happy with what was offered. However, there was also recognition that personal investment or commitment was important:

- I am satisfied with my parish and what it offers to help my spirituality. [367]
- Doing a good job. [217]
- Continue to do what you are doing. [241]
- Am fully satisfied with what my church and parish has to offer with regard to my spiritual shift. [22]
- I feel my parish is doing very well with my spirituality. It is my responsibility to practice my faith daily or when the opportunity arises. [634]

There were, however, some parishioners who provided had some suggestions for things the Church could do to increase spirituality. The five most common suggestions are:

- Missions, retreats, study
- Meaningful homilies
- Become more modern
- Reach out to children and youth
- Attract young people

Parishioners (n=72) were interested in learning more about their faith, doctrine and spirituality. Consequently, they suggested a number of different activities that might be undertaken to help them better understand their faith and spirituality. These ideas included Bible study sessions and workshops, retreats and missions, learning to pray, and talks on current issues:

- Scripture study/reflection. Sessions on liturgy spirituality. [515]
- Offer lectures/retreats by reputable speakers who are in tune with changes in the Church – they must be knowledgeable in up-to-date theology and Church practices. [746]
- Offer many retreats. Bring in regular weekly speakers. Promote spiritual ways of living even beyond Catholicism and Christianity. [96]
- More parish missions, more spiritual direction, more catechizing the faithful. Bring people in if your people won't listen to you. [816]
- Begin to treat adults as adults – offer some real education opportunities that focus on adult faith and life in a society that has left the Church far behind. [863]
- I would love to see a workshop on prayer. [929]

Some respondents pointed to meaningful homilies as a way of increasing spirituality. Some participants acknowledged the homilies in their parish to be good:

- The homilies are very interesting and are delivered with understanding and reverence. [600]
- Homilies – quite good at St. Teresa's

- Lately we have had capable people come to our weekend liturgy to give the homily. [722]

There were, however, suggestions for improving the sermon. The homily, in their opinion, offers an opportunity to learn about doctrine and spirituality. The homily needs to explain the readings and clarify teachings. Most importantly, though, it needs to relate to the everyday experiences of parishioners:

- Sermons that are connected to experiences that we need to overcome. How to keep faith in our world when we are surrounded by negative stimuli? [933]
- It would be helpful if Sunday sermons focused (at least partly) on explaining the readings esp. the Old Testament. It can be difficult to understand. [761]
- Speak on more relevant and current issues in society and try to relate it to the scripture. [384]
- Keep relating the homily to include the readings and the message of the Gospel. [647]
- Change the homily to current problems. Elaborate, ex. Drugs, alcohol, current events. 15 minutes maximum. [287]

For the Church to become more modern was something that some respondents felt would enhance their spirituality (n=25).

- It is necessary for the Christian religion, as taught by the Catholic Church, to be more meaningful for people, otherwise it will die. Rules without any understanding for the problems that families face destroy meaning. [505]
- I think the R.C. Church needs to adapt and open its eyes to the world we are living in and embrace change and differences, and not judge and condemn. [422]
- Respect the rights of all people to marry – to do so otherwise is going against the second commandment. In essence – become more relevant part of the times we now live in. [463]

The need for modernizing the Church was seen, in the mind of some participants (n=42), as a means of bringing people back to the Church, especially young people. Reaching out to children and youth, attracting young people back to the Church were listed as factors affecting their spirituality. Respondents were concerned about the lack of youth and wished to see the younger generation return to the Church. In their view, attracting youth meant changing teachings on some subjects, becoming more lively, and going to where the youth are:

- The Archdiocese needs to engage more young people and the community as a whole. This is not making the church look “cool” or increasing our social justice component. It means getting the message across to people that the Church is a place of comfort, sanctuary, community and peace. [826]
- [B]ecome more youth friendly, engage young people including young adults. This could be accomplished by tapping into the interests of youth instead of having such strong views on things such as common-law relationships, single parent families, homosexuality, just to name a few. [882]
- I would like to see more and different people offer our parish more active and viable events that attract young and old to attend and practice. [95]
- I think kids need to be taught that you can go to church and that religion and science can co-exist. More youth activities, travel opportunities, etc. would go a long way. [201]
- I would like to see more young people in church – teen masses or young people masses with homilies that were geared to them. [218]

Additionally, other factors that were mentioned increasing spirituality for some included:

- Changing the mass and rituals
- Adoration, rosary and devotions

- Visitations by priest and other outreach
- Reviving the link to schools
- Livelier music at mass

What could the Roman Catholic Church do to make it more meaningful for you?

When asked how the Church might make it more meaningful for them, parishioners' provided a diversity of responses which were represented by 114 different codes. A large number of these indicated that the Church couldn't make it more meaningful.

- The particular parish I am part of now does well. [642]
- Nothing to change doing well as it is. [659]
- Keep doing what they are doing. [306]

For some, it was the case of being satisfied with the Church as it is, getting strengthened in faith from being part of the parish and community. There is a feeling of contentment in belonging to the Church:

- I, personally, get great meaning from my church and church community. I feel very blessed to have it part of my life. [914]
- My present parish is doing an outstanding job as I had been away from church for sometime and have connected with God again! This parish has brought back meaning to my life, a better understanding and has given me peace. [614]
- Nothing – it is beautiful and full of truth, and I see it in all our wonderful priests, religious sisters, brothers, and lay ministers who work hard ... [814]
- Church is already meaningful to me. It is always there to take me back, no matter how many masses I have missed. [623]
- The Roman Catholic Church is meaningful to me. I can't think of anything that would make it more meaningful. [428]

Some participants responded that the Church couldn't make it more meaningful for them because their faith was an individual exercise. Spirituality came from within, from their relationship with God:

- My faith, my belief, and love of God. [196]
- My life centers around my faith so it is a bit difficult to imagine how to make it more meaningful. [929]
- It is not so much the Church it is developing one's own personal relationship with God. [761]

There were respondents, though, who had suggestions about how the Church might make it more meaningful. The five most common suggestions appear to be elaborations of responses to earlier questions:

- Youth
- Homilies
- More outreach
- Ordination of women
- Being inclusive and not judgmental

The involvement of youth, children and young families was important to many participants. They expressed a desire to see youth in attendance and participating in the life of the Church:

- For all the young children and families to come back to the church. [670]
- Reaching out to the younger generation that have abandoned the church. [851]

- More children/youth to complete the feeling of community. [432]

As suggested in responses to earlier questions, the homily is important to parishioners (n=35). For many parishioners, it is an opportunity to reflect and learn. Improving the homily was suggested as something that could increase meaning for them. While some wanted homilies to relate to everyday living, or the discussion of controversial topics, others recommended a “back to basics” type of homily:

- More talk about abortion, euthanasia, the sanctity of life. Sometimes (oftentimes!) the homilies are about “sunshine and rainbows” and not enough about grief and redemption. I like to hear gravity, as that has real meaning. [10]
- Relate homily to everyday living – experiences that people are living today. [606]
- Sermons that are based upon everyday living instead of too [much] from the Bible [which] is a good thing too, but more explained on a personal level. [66]

A number of participants (n=28) indicated that more outreach from the Church would be meaningful. They wished to see the Church more visible in the community, encouraged more visitations, and reach out to people in general in an attempt to provide spiritual comfort and direction:

- If the Church would reach out to people in a caring way and respectful way, it would do wonders for the church and for people. There are so many people hurting in our world and nobody from Church seems to notice, so people feel alienated and alone and left out. [2]
- Bring the Church outside the building walls into the community with more outreach; e.g., BBQs., visits to Iris Kirby House and other places where the poor and downtrodden try to live. [453]
- I know there’s a shortage of priests and pastoral care providers, but the home care residents really don’t get enough visits from them unfortunately. [253]

The role of women in the Church was raised as a topic that needed to be considered. The ordination of women as priests was recognized as an important issue that would increase meaning for some (n=24). To them, overcoming the perception of gender inequality was important. Additionally, the recognition of the role women play needed to be addressed:

- Allow women to become priests. Adopt gender equality. It is 2015! [326]
- Again, ordain women. You can’t keep ignoring over 50% of the population. Insulting! It makes us feel like we are not worthy. Like we don’t count. [662]
- Recognition of women’s role in religion over the century. [689]
- Let women play a more active role in the church similar to deacons? [423]

Being inclusive and non-judgmental was a way of becoming more meaningful in the opinion of some participants (n=22). To accept and welcome others unreservedly was something that the Church needed to do:

- When we reach the stage when all are welcome and there is peace and reconciliation with everyone. Listen to Pope Francis, open wide our hearts and doors. [45]
- Having its views adapt and evolve, be more open minded and embrace everyone. [422]
- Hypocrisy needs to go. We need to teach acceptance and inclusiveness for all people. We are all sinners. Each sin is different to each person. No one on earth need judge. [260]

Other ways of increasing meaning were mentioned by some participants. Some were raised as ideas in answers to earlier questions. Suggestions included:

- Modernizing thinking

- Explaining the doctrine
- Music at mass
- Missions, retreats and devotions
- Allowing priests to marry

Unfortunately, for some, the past abuse scandals and the way they were handled has left a wound that would make it very hard for the Church from doing anything meaningful for them:

- It's way too late for that. As a victim ... [832]

The Comments section

Space was provided on the survey to allow respondents to provide additional comments. Comments were represented using 105 codes. Two of the five most common comments were about the survey: Parishioners appreciated the opportunity to complete the survey (n=47) and were thankful for the chance to voice their opinions (20). The other three comments were reiterations of earlier ideas raised: a concern for young people (n=33), the priest is doing great (n=17) and that the Church/Archdiocese/Parish is doing good (n=14).

Looking at the survey as a whole

Many people did not directly answer the questions (for example, when asked what the RCC was doing well they described things the RCC was doing badly). Rather, participants often expressed opinions on topics of importance to them which were carried through as themes throughout their responses. For example, an individual may have expressed concern for the youth in multiple answers. The ideas expressed in the different questions were often interdependent (e.g., a respondent may make reference to a homily in their answers to several questions).

Consequently, a different analysis was undertaken in which the ideas in each survey were scrutinized as a whole rather than for separate questions. That is, each survey was treated as an expression of people's opinions to a set of questions about the RCC. To accomplish this, the codes created for the first analysis were reorganized to create a new set of codes representing the ideas expressed in the survey. The end result was 25 categories with 93 sub-categories, and one category of uncategorized codes. These were further reorganized into 18 categories which are presented in Table 3 and Appendix B.

The Church – a part of our lives

The first thing that stands out in the responses of parishioners is that the Roman Catholic Church has been part of their lives. The Church is a presence; it is a beacon, a spiritual and moral foundation upon which we center our lives. It is the vehicle for the sacraments, and a support in difficult times.

What is evident in the responses is that the Church is always present. The Church is a part of our lives; it is here when we grow up. Major events in our lives take place in and around the Church. It's here when we need it (n=10). Participants pointed out:

- The church is a “constant” in my life – always there for me [305]
- Just be there and to guide and encourage us [466]
- You are there! [297] *Listed as something the Church is doing well.*
- An important part of my life since childhood [120]
- The Church is the root of my life. I was raised in a good Catholic home & I was always taken to Church & not sent. All my experiences with prayers are positive. [251]
- My religion is and has always been a special part of my life. [297]
- Growing up Catholic, I stayed as an adult. Having a family of my own I now attend weekly with my daughter who celebrated her first communion this month. Church was something I didn’t realize I was missing. [605]

Table 3. Categories of topics representing comments made by respondents.

Category	Category	Uncategorized
A part of our lives	The scandals	The tabernacle
General feelings	The priest	Checking up on me
Attending Church	Church leadership	Church image
An inclusive community	Managing the Church	This survey
Mass and liturgy	Education and catechetics	Laity
Communion	Church as community	Music
Divorce and annulment	Youth and families	Married priests
Confessions	A new evangelization	Communications
Spiritual exercises		Role of women
		The preacher’s sermon
		Pastoral services

The Church provides, for parishioners, both a center for a moral life and a foundation for an identity. Its teachings help them know who they are and provide a means by which they can navigate their way in the world:

- The Church has provided me with a way to live my life. Every day I try to live a gospel-based life, praying, attending Mass, helping the poor and less fortunate. I was once caught up in what the world had to offer in consumerism and the pursuit of pleasure. I am now much more at peace. [929]
- I am a cradle Catholic. I grew up with a strong faith in God and in Church going practices. This has had a positive effect on my life. It has a strong foundation for faith which has helped me in life. [505]
- Childhood training. Taught right from wrong. Had high standards. [409]
- I think the Church tries to be a beacon or moral compass for Christians. I think in people’s hearts, they want that. The Church stands its ground on the tough moral issues and that is to be respected. [640]
- The moral and social compasses which have guided me through life were engrained by my Roman Catholic upbringing. [721]

As part of its presence, being present in the lives of participants, the Church was seen by many (n=161) as being a support for them at significant moments in their lives. During times of loss, illness and death, or at times of rejoicing such as birth or weddings, the Church has been present to provide comfort. It has also been there for those who may feel lost or seek pastoral counseling. The Church is there to help:

- When I lost my baby, the pastoral counseling at the Health Science was very supportive. [20]
- I feel the R.C. Church is there when I ask for help, when loved ones are sick and in time of last nights for dying. [199]
- The Catholic Church has gotten me through some difficult times; I gained a lot of strength from it. [355]

- When I was at university I was living on my own and was very [lonely] and homesick. The priest at the university chapel was amazing, always said something that made me feel better. Very comforting [655]
- Support from the parish community and parish priest especially when I was sick and going through chemotherapy treatments for cancer. My parish community and our priest as well as attending mass provided me with great peace at a very difficulty time. I was also blessed with visits during my hospital stay by clergy. Communion ministers also visited me at my home when I was unable to attend mass. [882]
- Being there when you need them most. For special guidance or just need to talk. [242]

One of the most significant roles of the Church is the offering of the sacraments, and participating in a sacrament was important part of their relationship with the Church (n=131). Getting married, being baptized and confirmed, and received Holy Communion were identified as significant experiences:

- The baptism service for my youngest granddaughter was very positive and welcoming – entirely due, I think, to the priest – now retired. [696]
- Getting confirmed, seeing my son baptized and confirmed [607] *Listed as a positive experience*
- Marriage; weekly mass; my parents being anointed before death; baptisms, confirmation, penance of children & grandchildren [439] *Listed as a positive experience*
- Getting married; baptism of children [539] *Listed as a positive experience*
- The fact that it is the only church where one receive[s] the actual body and blood for us. Give[s] me great joy. [546]

Three sacraments, in particular, were commented on in more detail: reconciliation, divorce and annulment (marriage) and Holy Communion. While respondents had positive comments about these sacraments, there are issues that are worth considering.

The sacrament of reconciliation

The sacrament of reconciliation plays an important role in the life of the Church and parishioners. It was reported by some parishioners that coming to the Church to receive God's forgiveness and grace was a positive experience, one that was uplifting and healing:

- Going to confession after being an atheist for 25 years! That was an unbelievable experience of God's mercy in which I felt the presence of Jesus acting through the priest. [884]
- Confession, every time I go you get to meet God – through the priests – confess your sins – feel his forgiveness and leave full of joy because you got rid of all your guilt, anger – frustration. They are not to blame for the decline in people going to Mass. [433]
- One of the most positive experiences I've had with the Catholic Church is to be able to receive the sacrament of reconciliation, the power to forgive sins that was give to the Apostles and passed down to all ordained priests through Apostolic succession. This is one of the greatest sacraments given to us by Christ. No amount of health or wealth in this world can go close to the experience of having a clear conscience and being in the State of Grace. [801]
- I went to confession a few years ago and was positively encouraged by the forgiveness offered to me. [926]

Consequently, there was an appreciation for the availability of attending confession and a call for greater opportunities to do so:

- [parish] also has regular confessions each week [801] *Listed as something that was being done well*

- encouraging confession [678] *Listed as something that was being done well*
- Confession be made more available and especially before weekend masses [898]
- I feel the sacrament of reconciliation isn't being talked about enough especially during the Lenten season and every other season. Repentance is a thing of the past – something which has gone out of style. Oh, what a shame. [248]
- Little or no confessional time [413] *Listed as a negative experience*

However, a small number of respondents (n=6) indicated that they were uncomfortable with individual confession. Some participants have had bad experiences at individual confession, and being forced to go to confession was unpleasant:

- Being forced to go to confession as a child with school ... I really didn't think I had made any "sins" to confess to but the nuns made us go! [750]
- Going to confession [437] *Listed as a negative experience*
- Confession very negative [450]
- Difficulty with confessions [297]

A number of participants (n=55) expressed desire for the return to general reconciliation and general absolution. It seems that parishioners would be more willing to participate in a general reconciliation ceremony than individual confession:

- Should have general confession. Very stressful for most to go in confessional. [412]
- We would like to see general reconciliation return to the church. It was nice when all the people get together and pray for God's forgiveness. More people would attend. [831]
- I would like the Roman Catholic Church change back general absolution. By doing this less people would be receiving communion without confessing their sins. [484]
- Maybe more open confessions; I don't go as often as I should but if there were general confessions it would make me feel better. [455]
- I would like to see general confessions return like it was a few years ago. In this day and age, people would prefer this to individual confessions. I think individual confessions are a deterrent. It should be either by choice. [248]

The sacrament of marriage; divorce and the annulment process²

For many parishioners, getting married in the Catholic Church is an important moment in their lives. When asked to describe a positive experience they have had with the Church, many referred to the sacrament of marriage, either for themselves or that a family member:

- My marriage was a positive experience. Fr. Joe [Barton] made it extremely personal. [218]
- I was married in the Church [144] *Listed as a positive experience*
- Getting married in the Church. [507] *Listed as a positive experience*
- Probably my son's wedding [934] *Listed as a positive experience*

However, not all marriages are successful and oftentimes end up in divorce with one or both parties seeking an annulment. The difficulties and perceptions associated with divorce and annulment caused many to call for a change in the rules

² It should be noted that it is not possible know when these individuals commenting on divorce and annulment participated in the annulment process. This may have occurred before the procedure was reformed by the Archdiocese.

concerning annulment and divorce. In their view, the Church's teachings on divorce and annulment were problematic. The rules were discriminatory and troubling, causing some to turn, in one way or another, from the Church:

- Divorced Catholic friends who have to go to non-Catholic churches to be married and have their children baptized outside of our Catholic faith. This is very disturbing and a terrible experience for one who was an RC all his/her life. [697]
- I am a Catholic woman who was married in a United Church. Neither my husband or his family were of the United faith, however they embraced our marriage and made it special. The unnecessary questions regarding my husband's divorce cemented my decision to not get married in the Catholic Church. [759]
- Divorce from Catholic marriages is almost impossible. It needs to be a better process as well. It makes people to run away from Catholicism. [277]

Some felt that divorced people were not treated as equals and not welcome in the Church:

- Murder someone and you're forgiven. Make the mistake of marrying the wrong person, no forgiveness or help. [303]
- Divorced Catholics, re: active participation in ministry [647]
- I'm divorced and looked on by some in my parish as not deserving to be there. [865]

Several participants reported that the annulment process was positive and successful for them:

- Annulment of first marriage. Catholic ceremony of second marriage [414]
- I was divorced and had to get an annulment to remarry. Even though it took awhile, it was a positive experience. [562]
- My son was rightful granted his annulment [842]

When asked to describe a negative experience and state something they would change, divorce and annulment was something that recurred. Most who commented found the annulment process to be a difficult experience:

- When I applied for an annulment the experience was not great as I felt humiliated and I done nothing wrong. My husband cheated and I couldn't get passed it and I felt they wanted me to try again so I stopped the process. [393]
- The annulment process is torture. I helped my sister here. She did nothing wrong but we felt she was being punished and really think this should be reassessed to help people in future unfortunate situations. [755]

It should be noted that there may be some misconceptions and misunderstandings of marriage, divorce and annulment, and the theological understanding of marriage may be confused with the civil definition. This is particularly evident regarding the status of the children of divorced Catholics:

- I am a widowed Catholic and have been engaged to an Anglican divorced man, and I am appalled at the Catholic Church's rules on marriage. The only way we can marry is for him to get an annulment and he has a daughter, so how can the Church justify those circumstances with an annulment? [841]
- The Catholic Church asked my friend's husband-to-be to renounce his children from his previous marriage by getting annulled before they would let him remarry in the Catholic Church. That's wrong. The marriage didn't work but the kids still count. [807]
- I married a divorced man and went to my priest to see about getting married in the Church. He said my husband would have to get his first marriage annulled and my husband would not do it because it would make his kids illegitimate. [901]

The sacrament of Holy Communion

Several participants made specific reference to receiving communion as significant. Being able to participate in the sacrament of the Eucharist is important to parishioners:

- Holy Communion [248] *Listed as a positive experience*
- Eucharist [316] *Listed as a positive experience*
- Providing the sacraments most especially the Eucharist [895] *Listed as a something done well*
- The mass and eucharist [916] *Listed as meaningful*

However, given the aging population of parishioners it is understandable that they felt concern about three aspects of receiving Holy Communion: standing during Communion, sharing the Chalice, and the sign of peace. In an aging population, concern was expressed about the spread of germs and contracting an illness.

Standing during mass, and Communion in particular, was a topic mentioned by a few parishioners (n=22). Among other concerns, it was expressed that standing was too hard for many of our seniors:

- Standing during communion too hard on elderly people [108]
- Since majority of attendance is by seniors, there is too much standing required [14]
- Too much standing – why stand when communion is on – most people sit anyway. [198]
- In the past we knelt too much now we stand. For those who find that difficult and have to sit they are unable to see the activity at the front. We are an aging population. [643]
- Standing after Holy Communion is too long. [270]

A number of parishioners felt that standing was an inappropriate response to receiving Holy Communion. The more reverent and desirable action, in their opinion, is to kneel and the removal of kneelers was wrong:

- People having to stand after Holy Communion – from the beginning it was kneel in prayer. I feel lost or no meaning to it if I can't kneel after Holy Communion. [611]
- I would not have the kneelers removed from the churches as it makes us humble. [694]
- One of the most negative things is to stand after receiving communions. The most reverent thing is to kneel and bow our head, instead of looking at every last one going and coming from communion. There is no respect about that. [480]
- Finally, we have a priest who recognizes the solemnity of the Consecration of the Mass and has the congregation KNEEL as is proper. [879]
- Absolutely hate standing after communion – feel it is distracting and negates opportunity for [post] Eucharist prayer reflection on knees with eyes closed. [84]

In addition to standing for Holy Communion, commentary was made on shaking hands as a sign of peace (n=23) and sharing the Chalice (n=8). These practices were, for some, unsanitary and put our elderly at risk of illness:

- Please discourage shaking hands – many have health problems and flu, colds etc. can be very serious. A smile or nod is enough. [405]
- Handshaking should be stopped. I feel it's nice and important to wish a person peace. However, this can be done by just turning and speaking peace. ... My spouse has a compromised health issues but people don't know that and to not shake hands they think you not friendly so he shakes hands but putting himself at risk of germs even if he use sanitizer. [748]
- I realize it is a choice, however, shaking hands and drinking from a "shared" chalice is unsanitary. My husband has a compromised immune system and feels terrible when someone offers their hand in "the sign of peace" and he rejects it. [99]

- Have Communion under one species only. This drinking from the Chalice is another possible way of spreading disease. [879]
- I would change when receiving the wine, do not liking drinking after other people, with so many health problems on the go that you can catch by mouth and just wiping the chalice with a dry cloth does not clean the chalice. Other churches have individual disposable little cups on a tray and anyone wanting to receive the wine would just get a cup. [815]
- I do feel both the sign of peace and the distribution of the wine are pointless and should be discontinued. [61]

General views and feelings about the Church

A positive view

Overall, participants seemed to have a positive view of the Church (n=291) and positive feeling regarding the Church (n=168). As reported earlier, when asked to describe a negative experience, the common response was that of no negative experiences. Parishioners were, for the most part, satisfied with the Church and their parish, and there is little that they would change:

- My parish is doing very well. I love the interaction between the priests and the congregation. I love the welcome I received when I first joined this parish. [283]
- I wouldn't change anything. I worry that too many changes would only make the Church more like the world we live in but not necessarily bring people to the Church. [569]
- My parish ... is doing an excellent job of providing a lively and vibrant faith community with various ministries, programs, and activities targeting the varied populations of the congregation. I feel fulfilled there. [945]

Positive feelings

A significant number of respondents reported positive feelings about the Church and attending Church. They used terms like joy [107], peace [612] and comfort [11] to describe their feelings about the Church:

- That every sin is welcome and that repentance and healing is always given. It gives me hope and peace that our God is a merciful and loving God. [29]
- I enjoy attending my church. It brings me peace and solace in my busy life. [291]
- I always feel at peace with myself and my community when I attend Church [346]
- When I enter our church, I have a great sense of calm, peace. I feel secure with my devotion to our Lord. [508]
- I feel good going to church, I love going. It makes me feel good and it reminds us of what we have to do. Be kind to others and treat them as we want to be treated. [677]
- The RC Church means a lot to me. I am glad I am Catholic. We believe in the true presence in the Eucharist. We also have the sacrament of Penance. Devotions to Mary and the Saints. [725]

A spiritual connection

The positive feelings about the Church were, no doubt, due to a spiritual connection that parishioners reported from being in church and their relationship with the Church. Parishioners (n=72) reported feeling closer to God [156] and a love for God [129]. The Church enabled them to develop a spiritual connection:

- Living in the truth, handed down from solid catechism, which enables one to feel true joy, as well as being given strength to carry one's own cross with patience and hope. [825]
- The most meaningful thing is the connection that I have with God's word through the Roman Catholic Church, the desire to follow God's laws. [257]

- It changed my life forever when I started going to church again on a regular basis. [166]
- Fellowship with God, Jesus, Holy Spirit and community [178]
- Every time I attend mass I come away with a renewed love for our God. [300]

Negative feelings

There were however, people who expressed negative feelings about the Church (n=45), and there are a variety of reasons for these feelings. Some arise out of disagreements with doctrine, some from the hierarchy, feelings of alienation, or liturgies that have become routine. For some, the past scandals have left an indelible impression. Whatever the cause, some people are unhappy with the Church:

- I have never had a positive experience with the RC Church [840]
- There has been no positive experience with the Church for me since Mount Cashel. [907]
- When liturgies become somewhat just a routine. You attend a mass and at the end, you do not feel different. These happen when priests perform the mass like it's just a routine. [908]
- Sorry to say, but not much. You seem oblivious to the issues of our times. People are dealing with serious drug addictions, alcoholism, poverty, ect. but I don't see it ever addressed in the church. If it is, it's done so quietly that not even those who need support, help or direction are even aware of it. [927]
- I am not challenged. I am not fed. [865]
- I have absolutely no respect for the Roman Catholic Church. I have never felt like I was part of it. I have my own thoughts and beliefs and I do not appreciate being made to feel like I am a sinner when 80 [%] of the priests in the RC Church are the sinners. [840]
- We need to be a more joyful people – our souls light – focus on welcome, positivity, forgiveness, kindness. [398]

Denied sacraments

A particular source of negative feelings was the denial of a sacrament, typically funeral or marriage rites. Parishioners (or their families) sought to have a sacrament administered, but were denied or had difficulty in securing it (n=21). The reasons for denial are varied:

- I don't that friends have been turned away from sacraments (marriage and baptisms) for not attending often enough. [824]
- One member of my family was married outside the Church and because of red tape with papers and forms could not have a blessing with family. [429]
- I am very hurt by the fact that my was turned away from his own parish for his wedding. He was baptized here, but through my fault he was not confirmed here. So he will have to be married in the United Church and will turn to that church to express his faith. [623]
- My nephew and his girlfriend wanted to be married in the Church. They have been living together for 14 years and have two children. He couldn't do the marriage course because he goes away to work, now they can't get married in the Church. That is turning people away. [849]
- A priest recently refused to give last rites to my dying mother (a regular churchgoer/supporter). He eventually came with some asking and phone calls from other members. Reason was he tired from Easter weekend. [269]

Being forced to attend church as a child has left a “bad taste in the mouth” of some. Three respondents indicated that coercion resulted in church being a negative experience for them:

- As a child up until I was a teenager I was forced to go in order to do all of the special occasions. After being confirmed, I have not attended regularly. [912]

- I grew up in the Church being forced to go to church regularly, so I have that Catholic guilt. [934]
- Is it still a mortal sin punishable by hell to miss Sunday mass? [483]

The Holy Mass

For parishioners (n=128), attending Holy Mass is a significant part of their lives. Being able to attend Holy Mass was, for many, a positive experience they have had with the Church, and listed attending Mass as something the Church was doing well. Although some may “attend out of a sense of obligation” [932], others report that the Church offers “beautiful Masses” [185], “beautiful services” [608], “lively liturgies” [49], that Holy Mass is “usually a positive experience” [901] and “the mass itself” [604] is a positive experience:

- The weekly Sunday mass is great. [909]
- I enjoy the liturgy and ritual [48] *Mentioned as a positive experience*
- I always enjoy the mass [635]
- Inspirational and devotional liturgies [746] *Mentioned as something done well*
- Celebrating the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass [651] *Mentioned as something done well*

Parishioners appreciated the opportunity to attend mass, or in some cases, that mass was available. In particular, offering several masses on the weekend was appreciated:

- Providing access to daily mass [623] *Mentioned as something done well*
- Mass is said regularly [540] *Mentioned as something done well*
- Having mass in my community [474]
- Trying to have masses to suit people’s times – when working and children it is difficult to attend [198] *Mentioned as a positive experience*
- Offering several mass times to accommodate families different schedules [20] *Mentioned as something done well*

However, offering mass to people in some parishes appears to be challenging. Some parishioners recommended reducing the number of masses to ease the load on priests. Others recommended offer masses on an alternating or rotating basis in small or rural parishes. As examples:

- Times in my parish are not good for me so I often have to attend another church and I rather attend my own. This keeps me away. [943] *A comment on attendance*
- I don’t like the change in mass time. 9:30 is too early 11:30 too late & too crowded. By the time you get out & get home your Sunday is gone. [386] *Mentioned as a general comment*
- Mass time at 12:00 noon instead of 10:30 am not convenient. [66] *Listed as something to change*
- Mass times – most parishes have Sunday mass at 11:30 – should stagger times 10:30, 11:00, 11:30, 12:00 in neighbouring parishes and 5pm on Saturday as well as Sunday. I think it would get more young people attending afternoon masses. [279] *Mentioned as something to change*
- Make mass times more convenient. There would be a lot more younger families attending mass if it was at a sensible time! [636] *Listed as something to increase spirituality*
- Have someone say mass in all parts of the parish on some type of rotation basis instead of weekly mass in just one church in the parish. [74] *Listed as something to increase spirituality*

Several participants (n=9) made reference to special masses. In some instances, the beauty and solemnity of the occasion was referenced, such as “special, beautiful Christmas and Easter services, healing masses” [383], and that “I truly enjoy Holy

Thursday mass" [821]. There was expression of interest by some for more traditional masses, "to see the Latin Mass offered more frequently and in more parishes" [898]. A parishioner commented that "I only attended the Latin mass once but I really enjoyed it" [635].

Four people commented on the offering of mass intentions, and recommended that the number of intentions for mass be increased:

- Difficult to have mass said for family (deceased) [663]
- I think the number of mass intentions should be increased so that our loved ones can be remembered. Sometimes it takes a year or more to have a mass said. I don't understand the reasoning behind the '3 intentions per mass' rule. [41]
- It would be nice to have easier access for masses for deceased loved ones. Often the families never know when or if the masses are ever celebrated. [46]

There was a group of participants, however, that felt differently about mass (n=23). For them, mass was lifeless, boring and uninspiring:

- Boring services/homilies lifeless liturgies [57]
- I find mass generally uninspiring and boring [636]
- Try not to make the mass as boring as it's at times. [526]

Rather, they wished to see a mass that was alive and joy filled:

- I think it should be more alive, raising your hands and praising God [386]
- Although I value tradition, veneration and respect, I would like to see more of "the joy of the Gospel" the Pope refers to [902]
- I believe there should be more emphasis on the positive and not the negative. We need more joyful celebrations. [913]
- I think that a lot of repetitious acts that happen in Mass becomes an action that we don't really understand the meaning of. I feel that if these things were explained and people knew the [meaning] behind them, the people would have more interest when they understood what is going on around them. [44]
- At liturgy sometimes there is an overemphasis on rituals and rubrics, while this can be good, too much can dampen the whole rituals. [45]
- Less ceremony and more humanness [547]

Parishioners also suggested that mass should be shorter [226], have more music and celebration [100], have a different structure [271] and have printed copies of prayers available [384]. However, changes to the liturgy presented problems for some:

- Why did you have to change some of the phrasing of the [mass] – after all these years I still make mistakes – and you changed one of my favourite lines. Why? [558]
- Changing the prayers we have all been saying during mass. Now everyone is saying different responses. Why? [73]
- I personally don't see why the format or responses to parts [in] the mass had to change back to the old way. [436]
- The new Roman Missal has had a negative effect on "full, active, conscious" participation in mass. How can we support Latin masses when the first and major change of Vatican Council was the use vernacular to achieve participation? [3]
- I am not always so keen when they change up the format. [381]

Other suggestions:

- Less focus on formality
- Alter servers and choir wear robes

- One weekend mass of 30-40 minutes with no music
- More interactive and not merely the priest preaching and readers reading
- Less pomp and more circumstance; less show

A significant concern expressed by a group of parishioners (n=27) is the perceived decline in reverence at, and for the Holy Mass. In their view, there is no longer an awe or respect for the sanctity and solemnity of the occasion. This lack of respect is evident in the clothing, including that worn by priests, children eating during mass, and talking:

- People talking in churches including myself chewing gum and sticking it on the pews or on the floor. Wearing jeans, short skirts, not dressed decent enough as Eucharist ministers, nail polish, ect. [385]
- Back years ago you go to Church, before church everyone is praying. It seems you can't pray in church anymore because people are always talking. [521]
- The disrespect given to the House of God. Like talking as if it were a rec. center. Chewing gum and wearing of immodest clothing, especially the young people. [7]
- If I could change one thing that would be to bring back some of the awe and respect inside our Church. There isn't enough quiet time for person to person in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Sometimes the priest doesn't show enough respect to the Blessed Sacrament and the God's House. [17]
- People not talking when mass is going on some people come to meet friends and talk the whole time. Ban cell phones. [198]
- When Fr. [name] was here a few years back, something he said struck me, "we have lost the sense of the sacred." If there was one thing I would like to see would be a greater sense of the sacred, or more basically, the supernatural. People are searching out there (look at all the spiritual/not religious types) we have some much to offer spiritually but I don't see it happening. [929]

Music at Mass

For a significant number of people, the music at mass played an important role in their (or lack of) enjoyment of mass. Many people found the music and the choirs to be "amazing" [306], "love the choir" [307] and find it to be "beautiful" [77]:

- I like the music, especially the new version. The choir does a beautiful presentation. They are a credit to our parish. [643]
- The Church's choir is angelic! Very comforting. [614]
- I love the choir that makes mass a lot more enjoyable [266]
- I particularly enjoy the music ministry [276]
- I find the music and hymns very uplifting. A choir and strong choir director adds to all services. [453]
- Love to hear the choir and join in the singing. [476]

On the other hand, a number of people recommended changes to the music at mass. Some suggested more lively music. It was also pointed out that it is often hard to sing along:

- Change the hymns. Make them a bit upbeat. You need music lessons to sing along. [299]
- I am the kind of person who really enjoys music and I wish the hymns were more uplifting as I hear on a scatter TV program. I feel this would draw a bigger congregation with uplifting music coming out the doors & windows. [30]
- The music should be more uplifting. [422]
- The music is terrible. Needs to be more upbeat. Get rid of [screechers] and [howlers]. [450]

Scrutiny was placed upon the choice of music. While some recommended that new songs or at least greater variation in the hymns played, others desired to hear some of the old hymns, or the old-time gospel songs. At the same time, there was a wish that more of the congregation would participate in singing, but pointed out that sometimes the choice of music makes it hard for them to do so. While some felt there should be more singing, others felt there should be less singing.

The preacher's sermon

The homily at mass was a topic raised by many participants (n=161), and opinions on the homilies were mixed. Several parishioners pointed out that the homily is a chance for the priest to help the congregation to understand the readings, learn more about doctrine, and develop a deeper understanding of faith. As one parishioner explained:

- I also believe that the priest's homily is an integral part of the Mass. It is an opportunity for him to give the congregation a deeper understanding of the gospel readings and how to apply them to our everyday life. Instead of preaching on Catholic teachings, today's contemporary priest often tell a few jokes, talks a little on social justice and something very vague like how God loves us and how we must love one another. "Loving one another" is a universal mantra that resonates through each one of us so we can become more united. But the priest's homily should be centered around what makes us different and what makes us Roman Catholic. [801]

Some parishioners loved the homilies, and others did not like homilies. Some felt the homilies were well done in many instances, describing them as uplifting, moving, thoughtful, and felt the homilies resonated with their own lives:

- Our pastor does meaningful homilies. Homilies are well-prepared with a message we can apply to our daily lives. [2]
- Wonderful spiritual sermons on Sunday – very uplifting. [208]
- The homilies on Sunday morning at [parish] are modest, humble & brilliant. They ground us in what is important. [241]
- I generally find something to take away that has relevance for my life. [901]
- The inspiring comforting and compassionate homilies I've heard at many funerals I've attended. [746]

On the other hand, many parishioners felt the homilies were not very good and needed to be improved. They described homilies in less flattering terms, indicating that homilies need some work. They described homilies as too long, too boring, irrelevant, and too "preachy:"

- To hear homilies which are based on some original thought and experiences rather than merely reciting the words of a gospel just read. [950]
- The length of the sermons and the themes of the sermons. Many of them focus on "preaching at" people versus relating gospels/readings to the everyday person's life. The connections between the gospels and people's lives are not being made. While the theology is important, I feel that there is an overemphasis on it and it turns people off. I also "strongly" feel there should be a time limit of TEN minutes on every sermon. After that, the message is lost! [883]
- Sermons where the same point is just being repeated and it goes on for too long ... but a sermon where the same point is just repeated tends to cause people to tune out after a while. [884]

- There also seems to be a lack of effort by some priests put into homilies. Often times trite words or repeated generalizations are all that is offered. Being the focus point of catechesis in the Church, parishioners deserve more. [817]

Participants had a number of comments as to what made a homily good or poor, with suggestions about how to improve them. These included:

- Explain the readings without repeating them
- Connect the scripture to issues of today
- Provide social commentary and speak on modern issues
- On faith and doctrine
- Make use of stories and analogies
- Exhibit sensitivity and discretion when speaking on social issues
- Well-prepared homilies that show effort was put in
- Avoid excessive repetition of the point
- Avoid trite words, clichés, sweeping generalizations
- Not too long
- Make use of laity to deliver homilies

Church as community

Although the spirituality of Church was evident in the responses, equally important is the sense of Church as community. For many parishioners, Church is a place where they can socialize, gather with family and friends, and meet people who share faith. As one parishioner stated, “we gather together in both the good and [e]specially the bad times” [29], and “I’ve experienced a feeling of belonging to God & my community” [352]. Being able to gather together with the same people over a period of time enabled a sense of family to be established. One parishioner explained, “When you attend the same Church with many of the same people all your life there is a sense of family/community when you go” [872].

A friendly place

A number of parishioners (n=202) commented on the friendly atmosphere of their parish:

- When I enter the church on Sunday mornings I am greeted with smiles and hellos even from people I don’t know. I feel like everyone is happy to see me. [420]
- I like the sense of community. At Church I get to see people who I would not normally have the opportunity to meet. [887]
- Parishioners are friendly and don’t make you feel like you are beneath them, like some parishes I have known. [937]
- The people are wonderful [931]
- Many friendly people in my parish. [903]
- Everyone is nice and everyone is happy, loving and caring. [176]
- Very warm and compassionate, environment welcoming to everyone. [136]

Based upon comments from respondents, the greeter plays a significant role in creating a welcoming and friendly environment:

- Being greeted and passed books to participate by our Greeters, sharing a smile and a friendly word. [920]
- The committee of greeters are great and it is nice to be able to say hello to them as we enter church. [891]

- We are welcome ... at the door with a welcome committee [432]
- The greeters make you feel welcome and its more social [437]
- Greeting parishioners going in church and having a chat and going out to greet us when we leave. [476]

Building community

Parishioners (n=346) expressed opinions about their church as a welcoming community. Most felt their parish to be a place where they felt at home:

- Always welcome. Always feel at home. [256]
- I feel very welcome in the parish [27]
- The church gives me a feeling of belonging [335]
- My parish is very welcoming to all who attend church [346]
- I feel both welcome and at home. After all, we are supposed to be one Catholic family. [433]

Part of creating a welcoming community is having a steadfast congregation which gathers together to celebrate in faith. Being able to see the same people on a regular basis creates the sense of community:

- I am surrounded by fellow parishioners I've known for years. Comfort in the familiar.[16]
- I feel welcome when I join my friends and familiar faces every Sunday. [177]
- Parishioners are familiar so it feels welcoming to come to church. [180]
- Sharing our love of Church, our faith, our beliefs & trust in God – praying together. It's good to recognize that we have this common bond of faith – and how we live. [212]

The experience of one parishioner illustrates this point well:

- It took a long time coming here to feel welcome. I didn't find it friendly at all, but I stuck with it as I liked [name]'s choir. It got friendly where I became a familiar face. [161]

Not feeling welcome

Although many feel welcome and part of a community, there are some who do not (n=68). Some feel the church is not welcoming, either to them personally, or to groups of society. There are a number of different reasons, or perceptions, that give rise to feelings of alienation or being unwelcome. These include dominant personalities, feelings of discrimination, or lack of effort to make people welcome. Many did not feel welcome in the church:

- We felt like we were an inconvenience – my sister who was not quite connected to begin with disengaged [241]
- I no longer feel welcome in my parish. I stopped going there a couple of years ago.
- Not all welcome. Muslims are more welcome than me as a Bible reading and believing Catholic Christian. [654]
- I do not feel welcome in my own parish. I stopped going there because of that feeling. [893]
- My family and I do not feel welcome or at home. We moved here from [province], left a great parish, with many friends and great priest. We have been here two years and have not connected with any parish or any Catholics. [850]

Some participants felt there was a discrimination against them or judgment on them which caused them to feel isolated or excluded:

- Unwelcoming “closed society” feeling when new to a parish [373]
- Sometimes it seems like only the upper class is welcome unless you are well dressed you are ignored [213]
- I'm divorced and looked on by some in my parish as not deserving to be there. [865]

- For a lack of better description I am a more traditional Catholic. At times I have had both pastors and laity make me feel rather unwelcome. [929]
- When I first came here, I did not feel welcome. I don't know if it was because I was a young single mother. As the years went by I felt more at home because I was older ... and people got to know me. [526]

In some cases, personalities may give rise to differences that result in exclusion or alienation. In many ways, it is a problem of difficulties in human relationships and interactions, misunderstandings and conflicts:

- One person – not our parish priest – has too much power and control, does not permit other parishioners to be involved, is actually rude and insulting when not given her own way, and is actually condescending to staff who have a job to do. [804]
- Our parish is a one woman show. Her way or the highway. I would like to do more than what I am doing but just about every week she makes different rules. [618]
- I also have a resentment when I see regular church goers being so disrespectful to their fellow man. I think respect is the key to a better world not necessarily spending more time in church. [934]
- I don't want hypocrites to welcome me if I attend church. [907]

The difficulties in human relationships can be extended to include rumour, gossip and evaluative comments as interactions that create negative experiences and make people feel unwelcome. Parishioners suggested gossip [848], snobbery [59], rumors [650] and rudeness [147] as problems:

- I wish some of the people who attend weren't so negative. There are those who comment on other's attendance (or lack thereof), on how someone sounds when they read (too low, too grand, ect.), which I know resulted in one person stepping down. [932]
- My negative experience has not been church but with those who are seen to be in charge. Some of the "pillars" are very nasty people and they do cause others to leave the parish. [804]
- Efforts have been made by some [to be more welcoming], but most have stopped because of words and actions others directed toward them. [804]
- Not with the Church as such but with people who are not willing to share their time or talent but sit back & complain about those who go above & beyond to help in every way possible. [842]
- Sometimes it makes me wonder how people spread gossip, other people saying you don't do this right, other people telling me to my face, give up volunteer work at the end they say to me, only dirty thanks you'll get out if it. [521]

The comments suggest that making an effort to reach out to others is very important in making people feel like they are part of the community. But it isn't just the priests and greeters, but all members of the community who need to make an effort:

- More friendliness from parishioners. Clergy and greeters do great but it does not always extend beyond. [344]
- People who only attend on special occasions are not welcomed properly. Every effort should be made to get them back again. [1]
- It seems they know the same people, never anyone outside that even though you are there weekly, even daily. [413]
- More people could be friendly and speak to you [86]
- Being ignored, made to feel like a stranger [57]

However, a small number of respondents recognized that despite the human frailties that exist, something transcendent made them feel welcome. Knowing that the Roman Catholic Church is a universal church was what made them feel welcome:

- I feel at home because I know the RC church is the fullness of truth and this is consistent at any RC Church I may attend. [373]
- The RC church is universal, and therefore I feel something close to me wherever I am. [861]
- I think I view it as a truly universal church where all are welcome, including me. I look around at Mass and I see rich and poor, and more recently people from many nations. [929].
- No matter where I go the mass is always the same even in other countries so you still feel at home. [886]

Youth and families

While community is an important part of parishioners' life in the Church, for many a significant component of that community is missing. Approximately one-quarter of the respondents (n=204) commented upon the absence of youth and young families in the parishes. While some parishes have activities to involve children, which is appreciated by families, more needs to be done to attract youth. Young people are absent:

- I would love to see more young people such as myself. [245]
- Encouraging the youth in some way would be good to get them back into the church again would be a plus. [27]
- I would love to see more youth attend and involved. When my children were growing up I [led] Catechesis and sacrament prep. We had over 100 children. Now I see about 25. I am not sure how to change this but would like to see the number grow. [276]
- Reaching out to the younger generations that have abandoned the church. I have no idea how this could be done. [851]
- I love the Catholic Church, she is wonderful and I know God will take care of her but we have to get our young people to come back and that is where our resources should be focused. [886]

Concomitant with the absence of youth, is the noted absence of young families:

- It would help [to make it more meaningful] if more families & their children would attend church more. [415]
- Would like to see more done to encourage more young families with their children to attend mass more regular this may get the parent involved in the ministries. [838]
- Too many young families not going to mass. [291]

However, many participants recognized and appreciated the efforts that were being made to involve children in the life of the Church. Welcoming children, having children's activities and liturgy, sacramental preparation and involvement were seen as positive actions:

- Children are really welcomed at mass [451]
- Excellent children's liturgy program [2260]
- Trying to include young children and families in the Sunday mass. [672]
- My children's program at [parish] was excellent. [944]
- Involving the children in the service at my parish. [759]

Although it was recognized that the absence of youth and young families was a serious issue that needed to be addressed, there wasn't necessarily a clear answer. Parishioners did offer suggestions and courses of action, including comments about things already happening in the Archdiocese:

- Family catechesis
- Children and youth outings

- Roles for children and youth in the mass
- Roles for children and youth in the ministries
- Welcoming children and youth including having the priest speak to them
- A regular mass dedicated and structured for youth, such as a folk mass, including having youth groups provide music
- Use social media to attract youth
- Put in place a religious education coordinator
- A youth community
- Develop a comprehensive strategy to encourage youth
- More meaningful liturgy and homilies
- Socials for young families, including garden parties
- Online services to help families
- More convenient mass times
- Family oriented service

Being open and accepting

Although many parishioners feel strongly about their parish as being a community, the sentiment was expressed that not all are welcome. A common perception was expressed that the Church is not inclusive, that is certain sectors of society are excluded from participation in the Church. This may include homosexuals, divorced adults, people from other countries, religions or denominations, and too a lesser extent, single people.

Being judgmental

The Church, it was felt, was judgmental (n=29):

- Hypocrisy needs to go. We need to teach acceptance and inclusiveness for all people. We are all sinners. Each sin is different to each person. No one on earth need judge. [260]
- Having its views adapt and evolve, be more open-minded and embrace everyone. [422]
- Create a less judgmental attitude so people are comfortable. [5]
- We need to address the parishioners who are so judgmental that they turn people away from both the parish and the faith. [804]
- More inclusion and less judgmental. [137]
- When my children were receiving their sacraments – the sacrament leaders were so judgmental. [218]

Alternative lifestyles

The Church was perceived as being particularly discriminatory against individuals with alternative lifestyles. They recommended that the Church change its stance or teachings towards those with alternative lifestyles (n=52):

- The full acceptance of gay and lesbian marriage. They're also human being that are capable of great love. {29]
- I would like to see same sex relationships be accepted and part of the Church. [247]
- I would like to see the Church to welcome the LGBT into the Church. After all they are children of God & there sexual orientation shouldn't have anything to do with religion. [512]
- It would make me feel so much better if the church accepted gays into the church. We could go to church as a family, like we used to do. [677]
- There's a big focus on young families. That's good, but what about single adults, or childless couples, divorced individuals, widows, widowers, same-sex couples, ect? [57]

However, not everyone felt that the Church should change its position, or that it was being too liberal in its views:

- You seem to want to promote gay & lesbian relationships. [698]
- Stop homosexuality [533]
- ... tell non-Catholics to refrain from receiving Holy Communion at Mass. At events where Holy Communion is being distributed. [651]

Other denominations and religions

Several respondents indicated that the Church was not ecumenical and excluded other denominations from participation. The expressed view was that because we are all Christians, people from other denominations should be allowed to participate in Holy Communion:

- One thing I would like to change would certainly be to consider welcoming other denominations and treating them as Christians in our churches. Not offering the opportunity to non-Catholics to come forward for Eucharist to me is not acceptable ... What makes Roman Catholics so “high and mighty” that they think their church is better than another? [628]
- Sometimes they seem to be one-sided! Like they’re the only true religion. I wish at times they would be more liberal! They should understand all other religions! [252]
- I would [love] to see a time when everyone who is a practicing Christian would be invited to our communion. Visitors are left out – I don’t think that is God’s plan. [487]
- I would change the communion rite. God (Jesus) instituted the Bless[ed] Sacrament for all Christians. Why, therefore can’t the other denominations not receive the Holy Eucharist in the Catholic Church? It is utterly ridiculous and should be changed. [63]
- Welcome non-Roman Catholic religions as practice. [587]

Equality

In general, the overarching theme being communicated by this group was that of equality. The church “is the one place where I am equal to everyone else in the community” [913], or at least it should be. Parishioners were calling for “equality for all people” [87] and that “everyone is equal” [910]. This call for equality extended to women in the Church, homosexuals, members of other denominations and single people. But it also pertained to the way rules were applied to people. Some people seemed to be entitled to certain privileges while others weren’t. This seem particularly evident at funerals:

- Sometimes there are different rules for different people. A priest may allow “friends” to do things that wouldn’t allow others to do – first instance no marriage course, no baptism instructions. People notice those things – everyone should be treated the same. [502]
- The topic of – Eulogies -- ... those who are “prominent” are allowed to have a eulogy. [410]

One parishioner, though, felt that the Church was being too generous, that those who do not attend regularly should not be treated the same as everyone else [507].

However, some parishioners felt that their parish was making strides to be more accepting and accommodating. They felt the parish was welcoming to everyone, and that all could be part of the community:

- Our parish is all inclusive – gender – sexual orientation – all are welcome – our priests speak this aloud fairly often. [212]
- My parish excels in inclusion of the community and its offerings to those people. [381]

- The Church is finally starting to include all people. We need to welcome divorce couples and homosexuals. We may not agree with their lifestyle but they are God's children too. [420]
- Everyone is welcome in our Church! [401]
- Being open to non-traditional families ie people/parents who are choosing not to be married [221] *Mentioned as something that is being done well.*

Education, catechism and spiritual formation

Although many see the Church as a community, for others the Church is the beacon of spirituality, and they seek guidance from the Church:

- Help me to be more spiritual. [71]

The Holy Mass, and Holy Communion in particular, is the heart or essence of the faith of the Church. An extension of the Holy Mass and Holy Communion is participation in various devotions and adorations (n=28). In particular, dedication to the Blessed Sacrament was seen as positive experience and something that was being done well:

- Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. [689] *Mentioned as a positive experience*
- Blessed sacrament adoration. [692] *Mentioned as a positive experience*
- Stations of the Cross – Lent. Weekly exposition of the Blessed Sacrament [442] *Listed as something being done well*
- Celebrating Lent with group “Stations of the Cross” in our churches. Having the Rosary as groups especially during May and October. [520] *Listed as something done well*
- The [presence] of the Tabernacle @ St. Pat’s [758] *Mentioned as a positive experience*

Consequently, there was a call for greater opportunities for devotion and adoration. This included:

- More gatherings for the praying of the Rosary
- More prayers and devotions to Mary
- More exposition of the Blessed Sacrament
- More outdoor activities, such as processions
- Observing the practice of First Fridays and First Five Saturdays
- Reintroducing Irish traditions and customs, such as May crownings
- Celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday
- Reviving the Angelus

Above all, there was a desire for a greater acknowledgement of, and respect for the Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar:

- More reverence given to the True Presence of Jesus, in the Blessed Sacrament. It should be talked about from the altar, very frequently. There should be time after Holy Communion for thanksgiving and the music stopped for silence. [7]
- A greater love, respect and reverence for the real presence of Jesus in the most blessed sacrament [442]
- I see people in the pews with little or no formation on the real presence of Jesus Christ ... a lack of respect for Jesus in the Sacrament and a lack of knowledge that Jesus is right here in the Eucharist. [709]

In addition to adoration and devotions, the opportunity to engage in activities that provide spiritual guidance or instruction were appreciated and encouraged. Many found participation in retreats and missions to be positive experiences, and

welcomed the offering of Bible studies, adult faith formation groups, and lectures. Some suggestions include:

- Maybe you could offer a course in spirituality. [556]
- Stimulating presentations re theology [550]
- It would be nice to have some spiritual retreat on the island where people could discuss and share their doubts, questions, and faith. [42]
- Perhaps offer monthly talks on some of the current issues it [Church] is facing & explaining the Church's stance on these issues. [463]
- Have sessions that explain how Church doctrine can be believed in light of the many advances in science that explain the origin of the planet Earth. [402]

A desire for more spiritual formation is also evident in comments concerning catechetical programs, relationships to the schools, and general program development. The loss of denominational schools was seen by some (n=21) as a great loss to the development of the faith:

- Bring religion back to the schools. I feel that's when everything changed and younger people stopped going. [476]
- Try to get religion back in the schools. When it was taken out our young people gave up going to Church. [62]
- The loss of Catholic schools was a tragedy. [502]
- We have to bring religion back in to the classroom. We have gone to Mass in Florida and they have religion in their schools. It makes all the difference in the world. [867]
- I would like it kept in our schools and not have our religious beliefs pushed to the side so easily. [613]

The adoption of parish-based and home-based catechetical programs received favourable reviews from respondents. Parishioners (n=31) felt the children's catechetical programs were positive experiences, something that was being done well. However, parents indicated that greater support for families is needed:

- I would like more help with the home based religion program and if you have any questions or help there should be people to help you. [919]
- As catechism is no longer taught in the schools, it is now the responsibility of busy parents and this is very difficult to do. Sunday catechism classes would be awesome. [898]

On the other hand, responses suggested that there is either disapproval of the program or room for improvement. For example:

- I don't think they are properly prepared for the sacredness of the Eucharist. I don't think that we teach them the 10 commandments very well because they don't understand them at least my nieces and nephews don't. [886]

Suggestions for improvements or changes to the children's catechetical program include:

- Supporting parents and families
- Reconciliation before communion
- Not depriving children of sacraments because of lack of attendance
- Flexibility in offering the catechetical program
- Sunday classes for children
- Confirmation at a later age for children
- Archdiocese programs for children

The adult catechism programs received a mixed review. For example, while some thought that “marriage prep is amazing” [816], another responded that “there should be no pre-marriage program” [363]. There should be greater flexibility and accommodations in helping parishioners participate in the various programs [464].

Parishioners expressed a desire for a better understanding of their faith:

- I think there should be some way to educate the people more on our religion there are people in our parish who don't know what rosary beads are for or what is the rosary. [838]
- I think that a lot of repetitious acts that happen in Mass becomes an action that we really don't know the meaning of. I feel that if these things were explained and people knew the meaning behind them, the people would have more interest when they understand what is going on around them. [44]
- To help & guide us to better understand the meaning of our lives. [570]

A new evangelization

Although most respondents viewed the Church positively and would change little, there were many comments that provide insight into how the Church and its teachings are perceived. Some comments suggest an institution that preaches “closed-minded doctrine” [874]. For others, there is a question about the relevance of the Church and its teachings as they struggle with spirituality in a modern world.

The struggle with understanding the faith and doctrine, and the quest for spirituality is evident in comments made concerning the teachings of the Church and its applicability to the modern condition (299 comments were made). In general, the comments from parishioners suggest that there is a need for a new evangelization, a shift from understanding Catholicism as rules or doctrine to a way of being that is founded upon a doctrine of love of God and neighbour. In general, it was felt that the Church's teachings were not relevant to modern life; the Church was too bureaucratic and hierarchical; the Church is too rule-driven. At same time, comments also suggest a tension between a “liberal” view of Catholicism and a more “conservative or traditional” view of the teachings. The problem was expressed eloquently by one parishioner:

- The vast majority of people have a perception of the Catholic Church that is primarily based upon ‘rigid dogma.’ Shouldn't it be based upon the love and mercy of Jesus Christ, and how it is present in the Church and in the world? (St. Jude's Children Research Hospital is a great example.) [653].

This quote represents a call for a new evangelization of the Church and its teaching, finding a new way to represent the doctrine of the faith.

Modern thinking

A number of parishioners (n=58) commented that the Church's teachings were “antiquated” [513], “black & white” [556], preached a “dogma from previous times” [559] and the Church was “stuck in the past” [760]. The Church, it was felt, needed to change its teachings to fit the modern condition. The teachings of the Church were responsible for low attendance:

- Sometimes I wonder if I am truly a member of the RC Church, or is it just a habit? I cannot believe everything our faith teaches, nor can I say that we are right and other faiths are

- wrong. I truly believe that God is more open and welcoming than the narrow focus of our Church. S/he loves everyone. That is the most beautiful teaching of the Church. [619]
- The Church should change some of its antiquated views which I feel would increase the numbers going back to Church. [513] *Something to increase spirituality*
 - I think the R.C. Church needs to adapt and open its eyes to the world we are living in today and embrace change and differences, not judge and condemn. The world and its people evolve and therefore so should the Church. [422]
 - In my mind the Church needs to go forward; not ignoring the past, but realizing that these are different times. We have a strong foundation but if we are to encourage others to come back, we must become more encompassing. [388]
 - Many question the existence of God. We need a more liberal explanation of who or what God is. [288]
 - Change all church focus from “salvation” and that Jesus died for my sins to Jesus[’s] own focus on right relationships with God, each other, another and all of creation ... There is far more life in celebrating God’s faithful, wise and loving presence than on faith failings & shame & guilt. Need to affirm goodness more [&] build more on as from in fostering supportive and caring relationships. [615]

Rules, rules, rules

Perceptions of, and encounters with rules of the church were listed as negative experiences or things to change. Several anecdotes were provided by participants in which Church rules were perceived as obstacles to fully participating in the sacraments. Sometimes the rules, it was felt were applied inconsistently. Some examples provided by participants included:

- The Church needs to be a bit more lenient regarding marriages. Example – ceremony has to be performed in a church. So many young people are now getting married in outdoor and sunny destinations without a church ceremony. There are numerous other things. [6]
- You need [to be] more flexible in funeral masses. I wanted a friend who can sing for my husband mass and he was only allowed to sing one song and I was very mad and I paid for the rest of the singers and I still would have paid anyway. This was NOT FAIR. ... I felt like going to another church and was in great pain with my husband and pet passing at the same time. [549]
- I would remove the burden of guilt impressed upon us as children/youth for so many “wrong” things that are not wrong (missing mass, using birth control, ect.) and turn it around to give joy for doing things that are good – loving people, helping people, listening to needy people, gardening, enjoying nature, laughing, celebrating simply and being thankful for all we have. I feel like this guilt thing has taken away so much joy. [619]
- One of our family members got married and wanted a full mass and had to pressure the priest as spouse was of a different religion. As a practicing Catholic I feel this was not appropriate, the spouse always attends church with our family. [507]
- Recent ordained priests are too right wing – they sound like right out of the fifties, no flexibility – just stick to the rules – too conservative. [375]

The hierarchy

The Church, by some, is perceived as a hierarchy and bureaucracy that is both inhuman and disconnected. Comments suggest there is an anger and resentment towards this hierarchy:

- Rigid, unmoving structures and an inability to move with the times creates negativity. [5]
- Realistically, you are not “with it.” The R.C. Church from the top down is basically an “old boys’ club.” It’s a different world out there from 50 years ago. [638]
- Get rid of the present set up of hierarchy. No one relates to that anymore – gone are the days when we put pastors on a pedestal. We need ‘real’ people as leaders. [35]

- The Church has too long practiced anti-historical institutionalism. In its insecure reliance on the (often mis-interpreted) importance of past authority, it has often lost focus on present and future needs. [391]
- In the past, more so than recently, emphasis on church as hierarchy (i.e. bishop, priests, ect.) rather than on Church as people. Rules and regulations as being the “essence” of Church. [746] *Mentioned as a negative experience.*

Teaching and sin

The topic of sin as a teaching of the Church was controversial. Those who mentioned it (n=22) were divided on the issue. Some disagreed with the Church’s teachings and objected with (or even took offense to) views on abortion, birth control and contraception, cohabitation and sexuality. One parishioner commented on “the past use of fear and punishment to keep Catholics ‘in line’” [636]. As one person remarked:

- I did not like all of the right to life preaching that went on in the past. I nearly left the Church because of it. [361]

However, a few remarked that the Church ought to do more. For example, one parishioner thought that “some priests don’t preach on abortion (ect.) often enough” [725] and that “people don’t know what sin is now, especially younger people” [725].

Yet, there is a tension for some feel that the Church is making strides and reaching out. But there are also those who feel the Church is not advocating strongly enough:

- Attendance is low, but this is not a Canada wide thing. In many other cities attendance is very high. I believe attendance is low because the Church here is very lacking in the teachings of the Catholic Church, there is nothing that someone cannot get at some other denomination. There Church here is very watered down and our priest[s] almost seem afraid to preach the truths of the Catholic faith, or they don’t know them? [850]
- I think the RC is trying to be more flexible and adapt to the modern world. [813]
- They do seem to be changing with the time. [426]
- There seems to be less reliance on canon laws and more reliance on basic spiritual and human needs, including those associated with sexual orientation. [391]
- The Church seems to be gradually catching up with the rest of society with Pope Francis. I hope this continues. [24]
- Doctrine doesn’t need to be changed, the way we are living our faith does. If we are what we should be we would set the world ablaze with the love of Christ. People will be attracted to the Catholic Church if it is what it was always meant to be ... a community of believers who are know to be Christians by the way they love. [816]

Positive comments were made by several people about the reforms that followed Vatican II Council. “Vatican II brought prophetic hope and confidence in the possibility of love in secular life” [391]. But not all of what resulted from Vatican II Council received positive commentary. “The inconsistencies which have occurred as a result of the fallout from the council, along with special interest groups seeking change, change that has little to do with the mission given to the Church” [61].

Of what relevance?

The perception of the Church as having outdated teachings coupled with the belief that the hierarchy is rule-based has left some questioning the relevance of the

Church for modern life. Of what importance are “outdated teachings” and how is a Catholic supposed to live in this modern world:

- Many people feel that the Church is no longer relevant in people’s lives. There needs to be some sort of way to connect people to the Church in a way that speaks to them and that applies to their daily lives. [640]
- Sometimes the Church doesn’t understand the hardships of parents trying to raise their families with the cost of everything today. [208]
- I would like to see the Church helping its members more with issues that we are dealing with. Sometimes it seems that at times the Church is focused more on the history of the Church than discussions on the real meaning of Jesus’ message and how we can follow it. [930]
- Talk more about family life and what people experience in today’s role of being a parent and about life in general, like a person[’s] concerns for his family, esp: drugs, job, unemployed, watching your child leave home for the first time, and accepting their choice of partner. [940]
- Make it more real, short sermons on what happens during week and tie it together. People are busy, hurting and need spirituality but not a top down approach. [892]

The scandals

Although most respondents felt positive about the Church and did not have anything negative to offer, the scandals of the past and the way they were handled has left an impression on parishioners, and the damage that was created (n=116):

- The sexual abuse that happened within the Catholic Church has been very disheartening for me. It has really impacted me. Our children are so dear to us. [27]
- As my husband was a resident of Mt. Cashel Orphanage, I feel outrage for the trauma some of the boys suffered. [925]
- My husband was an alter boy ... he can’t see beyond the scandal and hurt caused by the Church to innocent young people. [943]
- I feel that there still needs to be a lot of healing and rebuilding of faith to be done, especially with the issues of the abuses in the Church. I believe a lot of people have lost their respect and faith in our priests and because of this they have turned away from the Church. [913]

A significant, lingering effect has been the perceptions of the Church’s handling of scandals that have arisen. A number of respondents felt hurt by the way the Church handled scandals, and a feeling that issues have not yet been adequately addressed. The result is distrust and anger:

- The Church in NL still has not properly addressed the sexual abuse from the past. There are still too many victims who are too ashamed, hurt and angry to come forward. [672]
- Get outstanding [claims] by people who have been molested by priests & clergy [settled] up. Do it NOW! [404]
- I would like to see the Church do more to address the fallout of decades of scandal with abuse victims, ect. more needs to be done to reassure [current] members, and those who the Church wishes to attract that things have changed and that measures have been put in place to prevent such atrocities from recurring. The Church isn’t perfect and it needs to help people understand how it has failed at times and how it can improve. [640]
- Apologize, apologize, apologize, apologize to the innocent victims of sexual abuse by the clergy pedophiles. [73]
- Acknowledge the Church’s role in the many cases of abuse and offer a public apology to victims. [866]

Participants issued a call to “get rid of the pedophiles and perverts who are there” [840] and “that the Church puts an end to all sexual misconduct” [621]. However, several parishioners acknowledged that the Church has taken steps to address the issues:

- I feel the Church has made strong change to correct the problems of the past. [103]
- Archbishop Currie being open & pastoral in handling of abuse and his [taking] a public stand on it. [399] *Listed as something done well.*
- The effort the clergy are doing to correct the terrible things done by former clergy to our most vulnerable. [637]
- Openness about the scandals that have happened. [143] *Mentioned as something done well.*
- Offering help to victims of sexual abuse. [620] *Listed as something done well.*

Comments concerning scandal were not limited to the sexual abuse episodes. Reference was made to financial misdeeds, and the cover-ups associated with them. As with the sexual abuse scandals, anger and distrust were evident. Parishioners called for the Archdiocese to “come clean too much corruption” [552] and “clean up financial accountability” [539]. Some parishioners suggested that “parish finances should be audited by an accounting firm annually” [82], and that the Church should “bring in financial professionals” [65]. On the other, it was acknowledged by others that the “Catholic Church is making its financials more transparent” [759] and has “dealt with misappropriation of funds” [507].

The priest

For many people, the face of the Church is the parish priest. The priest is the representative of the Church, and parishioners meet the Church through the offering of Holy Mass, the homily, conferring the sacraments, and general interactions with the priest. For the most part, parishioners are happy with their parish priest (n=334) and feel their priest is doing a good job:

- The priests are warm and friendly and share God’s word with reflection and for thought. [182]
- The priests of this parish relate to all parishioners irregardless of community status. [187]
- The priests in my parish are very accessible and approachable. [335]
- Priests are kind and approachable, sincere and holy. [608]
- A priest who delivers awesome homilies which are pertinent to our lives today! [898]

The most frequent comment offered by respondents was that of expressing appreciation for being greeted by the priest before and after mass. For a lot of parishioners, this made them feel welcome in the Church, as though they were part of a community. Kindness, generosity and friendliness were terms used to describe the characteristics of the priest. As one person stated:

- We have a wonderful priest that is always available for the sick and the dying. That is my greatest fear that a priest won’t be there for me and my family. [886]

It was clear, from comments, that the character of the priest is very important, and can alter a person’s relationship with the Church. While a warm and friendly priest can make a person feel welcome, some respondents described interactions with the priest that left an undesirable and lasting impression:

- I have experienced priests who have shown little understanding or compassion for suffering people. This has broken my heart a number of times. [246]
- Some priests can be very nasty when things don't go their way. When I was married there was a mix up concerning the marriage certificate and the priest wasn't very nice about issuing a new one. [420]
- Priests that still have the high and mighty attitudes that look down on the people and do not attempt to relate with the common person [893]
- On a local level, I have not appreciated condescending priests at the pulpit with a holier than thou attitude. [881]
- [As a child] One day I went to the wrong Church for mass [that] week and the priest took the time to berate and call me names. He said you should not be here and pretty much called this little 8 yr old a liar and no good really. [400]
- I also believe that if the priest show more joy in their masses and in their work it will be a positive influence on bringing people back. [913]

The relationship between the priest and the community is critical in providing pastoral services. For the most part, parishioners(n=41) felt that the priests should be doing more to pastoral work, including visiting the sick and getting more involved in people's lives. One parishioner went so far as to comment, "I feel we are spiritually neglected" [756]. There was a call for greater visibility and involvement from the priests, for clergy to visit people in their homes, in residences and hospitals. People want to see their priest:

- Emphasize home visitation again. I have been in my current parish for almost 15 years (and 4 parish priests) ... I have yet to see a priest or any representative of the Diocese (in any function) show up at my door. The Mormons have been here numerous times though. [936]
- I would like to see Parish Priests get more involved in community events and get more involved with the residents so that they feel comfortable enough to return to weekly Mass. [876]
- Have clergy interact more with the people/community ... more visible. [845]
- More visits to the elderly in their homes – the nursing homes. My mother has been in [facility] since it opened – I have yet to see a priest. I have seen the Anglican & United ministers quite often. [446]
- When I was ill, a priest visited me before surgery but no follow-up. Many people live alone and after being in during illness it would mean so much to have a visit or even a call from someone associated [with the parish] just to say "Hello, thinking of you." [556]

Several comments suggest that the relationship between the priest and the parish can be strained at times. It was felt that the parish priest often has too much power and control over the parish, and does not allow the parish committees to do their work. For example:

- Priests have to realize that they are working for us and not visa-versa. [726]
- Some priests have to learn to back off and let the laity run things at times. [408]

It was recognized that the lack of involvement by priests was due, in part, to a shortage of priests. As one person pointed out:

- That we had enough priests so that they could be more involved in Parish activities – it seems like a job these days than a vocation, and while I realize that we don't have the priests needed, here is where the problem exists. [624]
- Would like to attend more than once a week but with the shortage of priests we [are blessed] to have Sunday mass. [502]

Moving the priests from parish to parish was frowned upon by some. Several parishioners commented that they preferred to have one priest whom they could come to know. Others had a priest who they enjoyed and did not want to see him moved:

- Stop moving the priest. Just as you feel that you can confide in a priest, you move him and we have to start all over again. We have no say in who stays [and] goes. [299]
- I would like to see the priests stay in one parish rather than move around all the time. [566]
- I think by leaving Fr. [name] in this parish for an extended period would make a huge difference to the entire [name] Parish. [439]
- [priest is/are] a great influence on our parish. I would keep attending if [priest] remain in here in our community. [612]
- Most important – priests should be left in parishes (for the most part) especially when they get a parish back on its feet & people back to Church. [251]

Comments made by a handful of parishioners (n=10) give pause for thought when considering the use of priests from other countries as a means of addressing the shortage. Two specific issues were evident. The first is language and accents. Often it is difficult for parishioners to understand what the priest is saying. For example, one parishioner pointed out:

- It is difficult to understand the accents of some priests who join us from other countries. The homily is then lost to us which is such a disappointment. [445]

The second issue is cultural. It was felt that foreign priests do not understand the culture of Newfoundland which presents a problem for parishioners:

- Have the priest instructed in our ways. There's more to church and spirituality than a Sunday Mass, that we can't understand anymore. [38]
- Filipino priests assigned to the Bay! Absolutely absurd. Must be inculturated first. [829]

Respondents provided three suggestions for addressing the shortage of priests. The first is to consider allowing priests to be married, or rather, to allow married men to become priests:

- I think that I would like to see priests able to marry. There are a lot of men out there that would make good priests but have chosen to be husbands and/or fathers. [821]
- Married men – become priests. I'm ready and also pastorally trained. There are more of me! [96]

As discussed in a previous section, comments also suggest that parishioners believe that a married priest would be able to better relate to them and their struggles in daily life. He would be able to provide better spiritual guidance and make the teachings more relevant. It was also felt that allowing married priests would reduce the incidents of abuse. (See discussion in earlier section on changes to the Church.)

The second change that parishioners thought would address the shortage is that of ordaining women. As with the married priest, parishioners felt that an ordained woman would better understand the struggles families face (see previous discussions) and would address the shortage:

- Allow women to become priests. There would not be a shortage of priests. [503]
- I think women should be allowed to become priests. This would certainly address the shortage of priests in the Church and provide a different perspective. [915]

- Ordain women priests. There are not enough male priests to go around and we have so many education women who would/could fill that void. I think women would be so dedicated to their job and with visiting the hospitals and senior homes, they would bring that warm, personal touch. [620]

It was recognized that women already play a significant role in the operations of the Church. “[W]omen are the ‘backbone’ in most parishes” [746], “are very active in Church ministries” [697] and “do most of the organizational work in most parishes” [696]. Therefore, women should be able to assume “a greater leadership role” [696] and that ‘more women be involved ... in more decision making, that their opinions be appreciated” [728]. “The Church needs leadership from the women as priests” [860].

The third suggestion for addressing the shortage of priests was to increase the numbers of deacons, including the possibility of female deacons. It was felt that deacons could preside a various liturgical celebrations, thereby easing the demands on priests while enabling parishioners to participate in the sacraments:

- Why not have permanent deacons, such as we see in parts of the US with similar plans in other parts of Canada. Why not give some consideration to this as a help to the priests we are likely to have in the foreseeable future. [516]
- I feel strongly that we should have deacons to assist the Parish priest. The priests are overburdened because of shortage of priests. The deacons could do baptisms, spiritual retreats, bible studies, visit people, ect. (there are a lot of educated retired people who could do the required courses to fill this role). [732]
- Use deacons! The priestly aristocracy must end ... I can’t overemphasize the need for deacons – those with real life experience. [365]
- I always wonder why we do not have “Deacons” where they have them in other places in the world and the [seem] to help all around. [423]

The fourth suggestion for addressing the shortage of priests, an extension of the use of deacons, is to expand the role of the laity. The laity, it was felt, could assume a much greater responsibility for duties in parishes and the Archdiocese. “There is a lot that can be done in the church by laity” [617], such as “involving the laity in delivering the homily” [445] and “give more responsibility to parishioners and less control by the parish priest” [32]. Two participants elaborated:

- I propose that the burdens and demands of parochial ministry not be left on the shoulders of the priests alone, but be shared by lay ministers. These ministers should be those who have discerned the ministerial call through Baptism, and are prepared for ministry by prayer and training. They would need to be accepted and recognized as valid church sponsored ministers by the bishop, the priest and the faithful. [906]
- Call forth lay men and women to be prepared to assume spiritual leadership in Parishes throughout the Archdiocese. Together with our priests to form team spiritual leadership in the parishes. These teams would not be managerial teams but would be prepared to work with their priests in the areas of Sacramental, liturgical faith development. [648]

Finally, a small number of respondents provided suggestions concerning the selection and training of priests. Some suggestions include the ideas such “a better monitor selection process” [509], review and renewal of seminary education [3], and workshops for priests [324]. It was also suggested that “the Catholic Church to carefully screen and follow their priests and how they are serving their parishioners” [95].

Church leadership

General comments concerning the overall leadership were mixed (n=11). On the one some felt there was a “visible display of solid leadership” [205] and that “some parish leaderships have sustained realistic, but suffering, hope through the recent storms” [391]. On the other hand, some felt there was “poor leadership, poor organization” [96] and the “Archdiocese could show more leadership” [900].

A number of respondents (n=54) commented on His Holiness, Pope Francis, as a role model, ambassador and spiritual leader for the Church. Those who commented on the Pope were unanimous in their appreciation of his message and efforts at re-evangelizing the Church. The Pope, it was felt, was beginning to transform the Church and introduce more progressive thinking. He was “beginning to move into the 21st century” [863] and “is changing how we Catholics think and act by the way he thinks and acts” [881]. His message and pastoral style was warmly welcomed:

- I think that Pope Francis is doing a wonderful job of reaching out to his flock. I sincerely hope he lives a very long life. [29]
- Pope Francis’ charismatic & humble approach to Church life is drawing Christians back to the fold. [537]
- I think Pope Francis has opened people’s minds to returning to their faith and given people a positive feeling again about the Church. [640]
- The current Pope seems to be progressive, liberal and socially conscious and seems to be heading in the right direction. [803]
- Pope Francis election, been a long time since someone said anything positive to me about Catholics. Felt pride again. [904]

In addition to commenting on the Pope, a small number of people (n=21) commented on the leadership of the Archbishop. For the most part, the comments were positive and supportive:

- I find the Bishop very approachable and kind. [826]
- The Archbishop is a very open and welcoming bishop, and his staff are as well. [881]
- The Archbishop is very approachable, open to all matters and decidedly “user-friendly.” [905]
- I think our Archbishop is doing a wonderful job as imitating the Lord as a shepherd of his sheep, and His Mother as our patron. [814]

One parishioner commented that s/h “enjoy[s] when the Archbishop celebrates mass” [53] and several indicated they wished “the Bishop could come to our Church more often” [673]. One parishioner recognized the Archbishop’s efforts in the context of the past abuse scandals, stating “Archbishop Currie being open & pastoral in handling of abuse and also his taking a public stand on it” [339]. Another parishioner, however, was critical of the Archbishop’s handling of a financial scandal and called for his dismissal over the affair [165].

Managing the Church

In addition to comments concerning spiritual matters, doctrine and community, many respondents commented on the Church as a corporeal entity. They reflected on administration, finances and assets such as buildings. In some cases, comments were critical, and in other instances comments provided simple suggestions that

might make devotion easier. One parishioner stated, “Run it like business for that is what it is” [165].

Managing the money

Criticism of the Archdiocese and the Church concerning financial matters was raised by several parishioners (n=43). Past financial scandals were a cause for concern:

- I would like to see more oversight of the money. The Church has had some very bad experiences with misuse or mishandling of money. That causes people to be cautious about giving money to the Church. [167]
- I am very disturbed with all the financial abuse that has taken place in the Catholic Church. People have lost their trust because of it. Why should people who have done these get these get away with it. 364]

Participants felt that there was an excessive emphasis on money, to the point that it detracted from practice of the faith. The Church, it seems, is “always begging for money” [840]:

- Discussions around finances to save the Church instead of our Church finding ways to inspire people to celebrate their faith & their spirituality. Then the financial support will grow. [438] *Mentioned as a negative experience*
- I don't like to feel money is the most important issue. I know you need finances to survive but don't preach about it all the time. [567] *Listed as a negative experience*
- The Church seems to be always asking for money in one form or another. I think this turn people [off] Jesus. [92]
- All you hear about is money, money, money. You don't hear the word faith anymore. [849]
- It is like a business. Money for baptisms, weddings, funerals, and to light a candle. There will soon be collection at the door. [907]

The theme of asking for money and its fatiguing effect on parishioners was continued in comments made about envelopes and collections:

- Too many envelopes for extra collections. [22]
- Too many collection envelopes makes people feel guilty because they cannot afford to put money in all the envelopes. [294]
- Though understandable, I feel that sometimes there are too many collections. [41]
- 7 envelopes on a Sunday is too much for many people. [702]

However, on the other hand, when a parish was financially sound, parishioners pointed it out and appreciated efforts to balance the books:

- Good financial stewardship at the Archdiocese and parish. [205]
- Honest efforts to be good stewards of the physical and financial resources. [189]
- Trying to organize finances. [101] *Mentioned as something done well.*

Managing the buildings

Several respondents commented on the beauty of their church, especially during special celebrations such as Easter. The decorations in the building and the altar contributed to an atmosphere of solemnity and celebration. They noted the church as being clean and well maintained, appreciated the chiming of bells, comfortable pews, and the presence of statues of various saints. However, other parishioners pointed to singular issues that may bear consideration. These include issues such as:

- Being stuck in the snow
- Poor lighting in the parking lot
- Inability to hear priest or lectors
- The presence of a very large stone on the property
- Limited access to the church
- No heat

Parishioners recognized the challenges that are faced by small parishes, and there was appreciation expressed for smaller parishes that were still in existence. However, there was also a realization that some form of amalgamation and sharing of resources was needed. Specific reference was made to the Sister Parish Program as a possibility for sharing resources.

Finally, there was a call for accountability on the part of the priests and Archdiocese. Several parishioners (n=11) asked for the Church to “be more trustful” [3] and “truthful” [2], and display “openness” [1] and “transparency” [2]. One parishioner expressed the sentiment “that a lot has gotten swept under the rug over the years. I feel that it has left a stale taste in people’s mouths” [26]. Therefore, the Church was being admonished to “be more of the people and not more of the establishment” [11].

Discussion: Emergent themes

From the broad categories arising from the data, several key themes have emerged that are worthy of consideration. These themes are:

- The nature of Church
- A new evangelization
- Our youth and our seniors
- The priest and our leaders

It is important to note that these themes and the resultant discussion come from impressions I garnered while reading the answers to the survey questions. They are also informed by my understanding of Catholicism and my practice as a Catholic.

The nature of Church

From the responses to the survey, several conceptions of Church can be untangled and these conceptions potentially affect the way that parishioners interact with the Church. For some, Church is the repository of faith, contained within its doctrine and canon. As a repository of faith, the Church is a beacon of morality providing a foundation for living our faith. Yet, how they understand and interpret that doctrine has consequences. For many, the doctrine is a set of rules to be followed and turned into practice, often without understanding or meaning. For example, why do we eat fish on Fridays? Occasionally, these rules get transformed into guilt and shame. For others, Catholicism is about love: the love of God and neighbour. As such, the messages for them should focus upon love, mercy, compassion and forgiveness. As a result, there is an apparent tension within the community reflected in the surveys. Some have called for a liberal and tolerant worldview while others called for a more conservative view.

Another conception of Church is that of the institution. In this conception, the Church is represented by the Vatican, the Archdiocese, the Bishop, the Parish, Priest and religious. For people with this conception, the Church is a bureaucracy and hierarchy which develops, implements and enforces the rules imposed upon them. It is monolithic, antiquated and, to some extent irrelevant because it has distanced itself from the people. It serves to perpetuate itself rather than serve the people. As an institution, the Church functions (or doesn't) as any other organization with corresponding issues such as resource management and allocation. Communications with parishioners is an important part of the operation of the Church, necessary to promote vitality and transparency.

The most common conception of Church is that of the Mass and sacraments. In this conception, the Church is a presence in the important junctures of people's lives. People come to Church to ask for the sacraments: baptism, confirmation, confession, marriage and burial. They come to Holy Mass to receive Holy Communion, and be filled spiritually. At Mass, they feel the presence of God's peace.

An extension of Church as Mass and sacraments is Church that is represented by devotions. Although not necessarily part of the sacraments and doctrine, the

practice of devotions, for many is an inherent part of their faith and their identity as Catholics. Opportunities for participation in various devotions, retreats and pilgrimages were appreciated, and there was an expression for more opportunity to do so.

Finally, there is Church which consists of the community of parishioners. In this conception, the Church is a community of believers and is as much social as it is sacramental. Parishioners come together as family and friends, a place where they can feel welcomed. Being greeted by the priest and other parishioners creates an atmosphere of friendliness. Families become integrated into the community and the Church provides support for families as they mature and journey through life.

However, it is also the case that not all feel welcomed. Some groups feel marginalized or excluded. Many people do not become involved in the parish and do not feel they are part of the community. And as is the case with any organization, human interactions and frailties are prevalent. Power relationships, gossip and rumor, and personality conflicts can create discord and disunity which leaves some feeling alienated or hurt.

A new evangelization

Although the most common responses to the questions suggest that parishioners were satisfied with the Church and had nothing negative to say, there were groups that called for change. These changes seemed to be aligned with conceptions of Church. One group argued that the Church needs to modernize its teachings. Another group argued that the doctrine has been watered down, and is neither understood or taught. For a third group, the teachings of the Church were moot; Church was about community.

The first group of reformers advocated for two changes that are, in essence, conceptually related. First, there is a belief that the teachings of the Church are antiquated and do not reflect the realities of modern thinking. Centuries old ideas do not have a place in contemporary thought. That is to say, the Church's teachings are in conflict with the secular world. Second, there is the question of the relevance of the teachings to the modern context. Even if a Catholic were to believe the teachings were not antiquated, how do these ideas inform living in a modern, cosmopolitan context? How do these ideas help families in their day-to-day struggles?

The second group of reformers advocated for a deeper understanding of fundamental teachings. People in this group argued that parishioners (and for some, clergy) do not know the teachings of the Church. Teachings on sin and morality were sanitized or absent, and homilies were often "neutral" as though the priests were trying to be politically correct. Some also felt that there was a genuine lack of belief in, and reverence for the true presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

Although they did not actually advocate for any reform, the third group seemed unconcerned about the teachings of the Church. To them, Church was very much

about community and the opportunity to gather together. Being with family and friends was the focus of Church, and its teachings may support that view.

Yet, there is a prevalent sense that Catholics are seeking a spiritual connection and guidance. There is, within the responses, a yearning for experiencing the love of God and His presence in our daily lives. Conflicting and contrary ideas have created confusion and uncertainty, leaving Catholics unsure of how the teachings of the Church are applicable to their lives and why. As a result, it seems important for the Church to undertake a campaign of helping Catholics learn more about their faith, the doctrine, and explore Catholic spirituality in deeper ways.

Our youth and our seniors

Parishioners expressed great concern over a lack of involvement by youth. They were concerned that not only were their own children or grandchildren not attending, but that young people in general were absent. While reasons for the absence of youth were not abundant (a few felt the teachings of the Church were antithetical to the sensibilities of youth), solutions were not forthcoming either. Some recommended changes to the mass, modernizing the music and updating the readings as ways of attracting the youth back to Church. One parishioner argued that it was important for the Church to speak out to show that science and theology are compatible and can support each other.

The comments suggest that the parishes are doing a good job at involving children in the Church. Many have activities for children, and children's participation in the mass was appreciated. The catechism programs are an important part of faith formation for our children, especially so since the changes to the school system. Comments suggested that catechism programs are not universally or uniformly accessible across the Archdiocese.

Confronting an aging population, it is necessary to give consideration to the elderly but thinking of ways of helping our seniors to continue to feel part of the community and sojourn on their spiritual journey. It will be necessary to make adaptations and allowances in the rituals of the liturgy to accommodate them. Many elderly, for example, find it difficult to stand during communion. They expressed concern about contracting communicable diseases through handshaking for the sign of peace, and drinking from a shared chalice. Some have a hard time hearing or understanding the priest or lectors.

Pastoral care is important for seniors, especially visitations by the priest. Parishioners expressed a desire for the priest to be more visible in the community. Appreciation was expressed for care received while in hospital or residence, and such support plays an important role in the well-being of the elderly.

Being inclusive and welcoming

The view of Church as community was prevalent, and many viewed their parish as being welcoming and friendly. It seemed that if a respondent was involved in the

life of the parish through some sort of ministry, they were more likely to find it to be welcoming and friendly. Participation, it seemed, was an essential element.

Socialization is an important feature to the feeling of community. Many appreciated have social activities and there was a call for more social activities. Planning social activities for three specific groups may be particularly important: young families, youth and seniors. Some respondents indicated they would like to see more activities and supports for young families to help them be integrated into their parish community. Activities for youth were seen as a means of attracting them back to the Church, and it is important to help seniors to continue to feel part of the Church community.

Some did not feel welcome and it was felt that groups were excluded from participation in the Church. Some respondents felt alienated, excluded or shunned. Some felt that they were not part of the "in-crowd." Although they may identify as Catholics and have positive regard for the Church, many find the teachings and practices to be exclusionary. Divorcees and single people may feel the Church's emphasis on family leaves them isolated. In particular, three groups were identified as being excluded. The first is women. It was felt that women were being excluded from full involvement in the Church. Second, Christians from other denominations were excluded from participation in Holy Communion, and this caused consternation for some. Third, it was felt that people with alternative lifestyles were being marginalized. Rather, they should be embraced and accepted into the Church.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations can be made for consideration in the formulation of the strategic plan. Based upon my impressions of the parishioners' comments I recommend that the Archdiocese undertake the development of a set of four comprehensive strategies to address concerns raised by participants:

- 1. A comprehensive strategy for attracting youth back to the Church, including:**
 - a. a study to better understand the attitudes of young people towards the Church
 - b. development of Church sponsored youth-centered activities
 - c. create special masses for youth
 - d. develop supports for young families

Parishioners expressed a great concern that the youth are not participating in the life of the Church. A number of the suggested strategies for attracting and retaining youth, including social events and youth masses. However, it is important to consult with youth and young families to better understand their way of thinking, their understanding of Catholicism, their views of the world and their needs.

- 2. A comprehensive strategy for faith formation, including:**
 - a. Missions and retreats
 - i. Sponsor dioceses-wide retreats and missions on a monthly or quarterly basis
 - b. Seminars and workshops on current affairs
 - i. Develop seminars and workshops to be offered on a monthly or quarterly basis across the archdiocese to discuss current issues from a Catholic perspective
 - c. Understanding the doctrine and the Mass
 - i. Develop a series of seminars or lectures on the teachings of the Church. What does the Church teach and why? Why is the Mass structured the way that it is? What is the symbolism?

It was apparent from the comments that many view Catholicism as a rule-based doctrine of guilt. It is also apparent that many struggle with being a Catholic in a modern world and do not see the relevance of the Church's doctrine to their own lives and the modern context. Yet, they identify themselves as Catholic and have a desire to be Catholic. Consequently, it is important for the Archdiocese to develop a strategy for faith formation to support the people of the Archdiocese in their spiritual quests.

Of particular importance is the potential for making use of communications technology to allow people throughout the archdiocese to participate. Using webinars, podcasts, or Skype sessions to enable people in remote communities or those who are shut-ins to become involved and be part of the greater community.

As an example, the World Community for Christian Meditation has developed internet applications to allow people from around the world to come together in a virtual space to meditate together.

3. A comprehensive communications strategy

- a. A centralized method for disseminating information about events in the Archdiocese and various parishes.
- b. Finding better ways of communicating with parishioners to promote transparency

Some parishioners lauded the Church for making amends and addressing the scandals. Others have chided the Church for not dealing with the issues. Other comments have called for transparency and accountability. Some parishes have extensive program development while others have little or no resources to do anything.

This suggests that a communication strategy is needed to allow the Archdiocese to communicate with parishioners. While the pastoral letter from the Archbishop has a very personal touch, it is reserved for significant events and does not communicate to parishioners information about what is happening in various parishes, or programs and initiatives that have been undertaken throughout the Archdiocese.

4. A comprehensive strategy on the role of the laity, including:

- a. Greater use of laity in ministry, including liturgical celebrations
- b. Increasing the diaconate
- c. Introducing women as deacons
- d. Women presiding at liturgical celebrations

The shortage of priests was of concern to parishioners, and finding ways of making greater use of the laity was seen as a possible way of coping with the shortage. Laity could play a greater role in the life of the parish and Archdiocese. Laity could play a greater role in ministry and liturgical rites. Mentioned a number of times was the possibility of increasing the number of deacons, including the possibility of women as deacons.

Limitations and next steps

There are a number of limitations to this survey and report that temper the generalizations and conclusions that can be drawn for two reasons. First, the sample is limited to a very specific group. Second, the questions were open-ended and responses were limited. The results should be viewed as window into possibilities, glimpses of potential concerns and issues on the minds of parishioners. As such, they give pause for reflection but due diligence is needed before any serious changes are undertaken.

By-and-large, the sample is very specific – typical practicing Catholics who live, primarily in a specific local and attend a particular parish. A new survey should be targeted to non-practicing Catholics to elicit their views.

The survey format was that of open-ended questions. Many surveys submitted were blank, or had responses for only one or two questions. Many of the questions had very short responses. In many instances, the answers were a single topic, such as “priests should marry.” What is unknown in such instances is what the parishioner may have thought about issues raised by other participants in response to the same question, such as “are there really too many collection envelopes?” As a consequence, the responses may not reflect the true thoughts of parishioners on a particular topic. This suggests that follow-up surveys targeting specific topics may provide more detailed information on the thoughts of parishioners and provide suggestion for future directions.

One parishioner commented that the format of the survey made it difficult to complete. If so, a more structured survey may help ease the burden of response and yield information about specific topics.

Finally, the data were coded and interpreted by a single individual. Consequently, there will be some inherent biases. A focus group discussion of the report would be a useful step in the validation of the interpretations expressed in the report. Further work would involve cross-checking and validating the coding of the data to strengthen the veracity of the interpretations.

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