

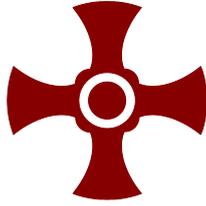
FORWARD TOGETHER  
IN  
**HOPE**

# The Way We See It

How Young People View the Catholic Church  
in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle



DIOCESE OF **Hexham & Newcastle**



## **Speak Lord, Your Servant is Listening**

A central part of the *Forward Together in Hope* journey so far has been the careful gathering of and listening to the rich variety of views and ideas, fears, hopes and aspirations of many people from all parts of our diocese.

We have spoken face-to-face with people at the back of churches, at meetings of the Youth Council, the Council of Laity, the Council of Priests and the Association of Religious. We've welcomed the opportunity to discuss with representatives from parishes and schools at Deanery meetings and elsewhere.

As well as the thousands of parishioners who have contributed through the Parish Consultation and Questionnaire process, we have listened to the voices of almost 5,500 young people, 1720 individuals and 43 clergy who have taken the time to offer their thoughts through various surveys.

It is good for all of us to listen  
and to reflect on what is being said.

We hope this document and the others in this series  
will help us to do just that as we prepare our diocese for the future.

*'I feel as if all the people who attend my parish every Sunday are part of my family  
and I am welcomed into theirs.'*

## The Way We See It

### The Findings at a Glance

22% of the students in Catholic secondary schools in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle filled in the survey, which provides a unique window into the perceptions of the faith of 5,482 individuals.

In describing the 'faith journey' of the young people involved, we can identify many places where they lose touch with the worshipping communities they belong to, and also places where we can reach those who are not part of parish communities but are entrusted to our schools.

Following their progress through the Church milestones of Baptism, First Holy Communion and Confirmation, shows that we lose contact with a large number of young people and their families. The number moving to other denominations or faiths is relatively small.

35% of those who were baptised are still practicing Catholics at the age of 18. The peak point for ceasing to attend church is around ages 10-11, but the fall away starts as early as 5 and as late as 17.

The main reason mentioned for not continuing to attend is often boredom or lack of interest – 'they don't get anything from it'.

Those who do go to church feel welcome, and like being part of the Catholic community. They feel valued by their parish, but do not necessarily feel so involved.

For parishes to help make them feel more involved young people ask for *social activities specifically for them*. They also ask to be more involved in Mass and other liturgies, and to be directly acknowledged and welcomed by adults.

Their responses show a development with age. From around 14 years of age worship and music styles become less important and there is more searching for understanding, particularly with pressure on Catholic values from society at large.

Young people regard the Catholic Church as being a *strong community* and having a *clear ethos and moral basis*. They would like to see more *direct involvement of young people* in the parishes and suggest various ways that this might happen. As they get older they are challenged more by society and need support in *understanding the church's position*.

The *quality of liturgy* and *vibrancy of community* are key factors in how young people see things.

Where they feel highly valued in a parish, there is a greater likelihood that young people will continue practising their faith.

To encourage them to become involved, or more involved, needs attention to a number of factors, but *social activities with peers* rate highly.

In schools, a variety of faith activities are seen as helpful by young people, especially *retreats*, (which are even more popular with the older students), *school Masses*, and *RE lessons*. These, together with *assemblies* are valued not just by the Catholic students, but also by those who do not attend church.

To help bring their faith alive in schools young people have a wide range of suggestions of which *more varied faith activity* is the most mentioned.

There is a wide variety of diocesan events that are offered to young people, and overall they have a good awareness of these, with awareness of the Emmaus Youth Village and retreat provision reaching over 70%, and even higher with particular groups. Actual involvement is also high in retreat and Youth Ministry Team activities.

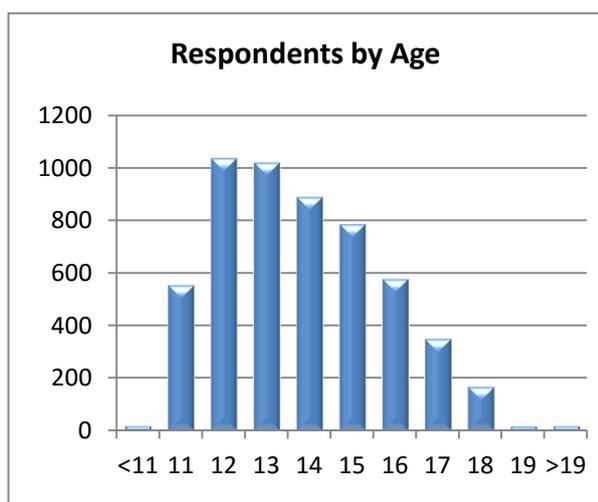
The numerical data provided by the survey will be useful in many ways well into the future, but the hundreds of thousands of words contributed by young people in their text responses provide a unique insight into their thoughts and hopes, and will be a valuable resource in helping us to journey with them more effectively.

## The Way We See It

### About this Survey

From November 2015 to February 2016 an online survey was used to collect the views of 11-19 year-olds about the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. A short video and a 'luggage tag flyer' were used to engage young people and promote the importance of the survey.

Catholic Secondary (including Middle) schools, University Chaplaincies and parishes were asked to encourage young people to complete the questionnaire. They certainly did so - and we are really grateful to them for their support. All of the schools were involved to some degree, although responses from individual schools ranged widely - from 1 to over 1,000.



By the time it closed, 5,482 young people had completed the survey, with the vast majority in the target age range; just 44 were aged under 11 or over 19. 53.3% were male and 46.7% female.

98.1% were in Catholic schools in the diocese. Others included 23 university students, 8 in employment and 20 in other schools or colleges.

We estimate that approaching a quarter (22%) of the students in Catholic Secondary schools took part in the survey, so it represents a very comprehensive and wide ranging view of how they perceive the Catholic Church in our region.

This document presents a summary of the key findings and provides a flavour of some of the many thousands of actual comments made. It also offers a number of thoughts and questions that parishes and schools might like to consider in looking at how we engage with young people in our parish communities.

It is worth remembering that in trying to understand why few young people are involved with Church on a regular basis we asked questions that prompted them to highlight 'what was wrong' and 'how it could be better'. It is therefore encouraging that a number indicated that much was actually positive and to be celebrated.

We have focussed this report on some of the more challenging aspects which we feel we will learn most from.

### Faith Background

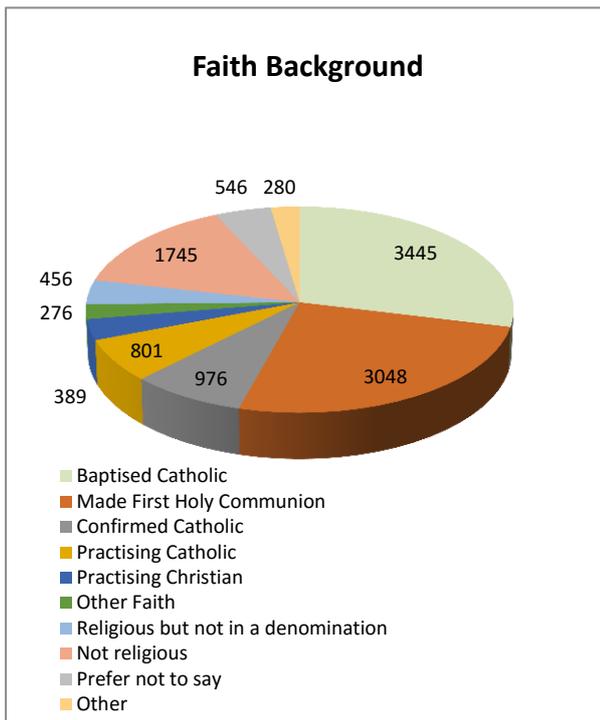
Everyone taking part in the survey was asked to select statements about their faith background. This showed that:

- 62.8% are baptised Catholic
- 55.6% have made their First Holy Communion
- 17.8% have been Confirmed
- 14.6% regard themselves as practicing Catholics.

As well as the baptised Catholics who responded, there are 2039 others who replied to us giving their valuable insights into living alongside our faith.

The data collected gives a detailed picture of the complex range of experiences that young people have between the ages of 11 and 19. It allows us to follow their progress through the milestones of Baptism, First Holy Communion and Confirmation to practising as Catholics.

The chart below shows the number of respondents mentioning each aspect.



Analysis indicates that, on average, around 35% of those who are baptised as Catholics describe themselves as practising Catholics at the age of 18.

Of all those indicating they are baptised Catholic, 26.4% currently describe themselves as *not religious*. This figure reaches a maximum of 37% for baptised 16-year-olds, but falls back to 20% for the 18-year-olds in the survey.

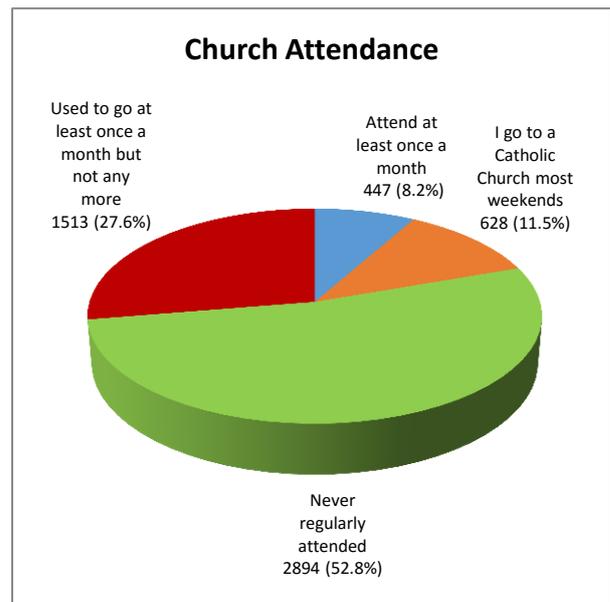
In addition to being able to choose from the main options, young people could select 'Other' and explain their choice more personally. Of the 281 who did so many simply indicated the *Christian Church* or *Other Faith* they belonged to or expressed the fact that they were *Atheist* or *Agnostic*. Others offered deeper insights in their own words.

- *I am not baptised or have done my holy communion but I believe in God fully and do go to church.*
- *I don't know what I am to be honest.*

- *I believe in God not religion.*
- *I don't know if I've been baptised.*
- *Going through RCIA in order to be baptised.*
- *I'm not sure if I believe right now.*
- *Spiritually enlightened.*
- *Don't know what I am. I might be Christian or Catholic.*
- *I have been confirmed but don't believe in God.*
- *Severely atheist.*

### Attending Church

Just over half of those completing the survey (52.8%) have never regularly attended a Catholic Church. 11.5% attend most weekends while a further 8.2% attend at least once a month. 27.6% used to go to a Catholic Church at least once a month but no longer do so.



The survey sample therefore gives us a very wide cross section of young people. It includes a range of ages; those who have never been to church, and those who are frequent attenders. A substantial proportion are not baptised. It includes young Catholics who have stopped attending church, and those who attend irregularly.

## Those Who Attend Church

### Why do you go to Church?

Those who indicated that they go to church at least monthly were asked why they do so. A total of 1076 young people answered this question by selecting all that applied from a given list of reasons. The most frequent replies are shown in the table below.

Reason	Replies
I feel welcome there	568
I like being part of a Catholic community	557
I feel I have to go because my family expects it	406
I enjoy the Mass	382
I like to worship with other people	264
I feel uplifted by the experience	256
I feel that it is a duty or obligation	229
I worry what will happen if I don't attend	111

The top two factors - *I feel welcome there* and *I like being part of a Catholic Community* - were common to all age groups, apart from the 14-year-olds, who showed a higher rating for *family expectations*, and the 17-year-olds who put *duty or obligation* highest with *I feel welcome* second.

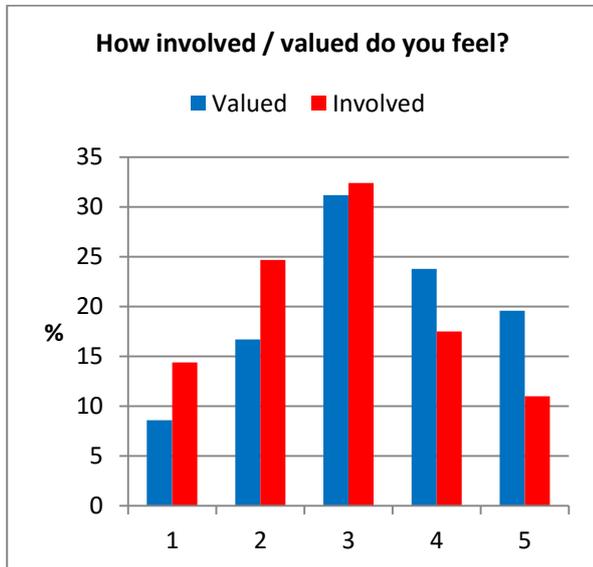
Some of the more detailed observations from young people provide greater insights into why they go to church.

- ✦ *It is a peaceful and reflective environment in a very busy week.*
- ✦ *I feel closer to God.*
- ✦ *My parents make me go.*
- ✦ *It rejoices me inside.*
- ✦ *My mum likes me to go and I like to make her happy.*
- ✦ *It isn't just for adults - they make it fun for children.*
- ✦ *Because I serve on the altar.*
- ✦ *I help out with things. For example giving out the palm crosses on Palm Sunday. I serve at the altar. Also the people there are friendly and I feel welcome.*
- ✦ *I like the priest ... probably the nicest man I have ever met.*
- ✦ *I feel like I can talk to God and share my thoughts and no one will find out but him.*
- ✦ *Friends go there that I don't see at school.*
- ✦ *I haven't been to church in a few weeks because I have been struggling with some of the teachings.*
- ✦ *I attend church because I have issues which are hard to discuss and the priest at my local church is understanding towards the problems that I face.*
- ✦ *Because I have been brought up to respect the Church and to take my time to worship the Catholic teaching. It also gives me a chance to connect with the people that I have lost.*
- ✦ *My grandad was a devoted Catholic and when he died I wanted to live it for him.*
- ✦ *I enjoy the charitable fundraising activities and other responsibilities my part in the community allows me to take on.*



### How involved and valued do you feel?

Participants were asked to rate on a scale of 1-5 (where 1 was 'least' and 5 was 'most') how **involved** they felt in their local parish. Overall, more young people attending church score themselves as *less*, rather than *more*, involved.



The largest number (32.4%) selected a middle '3' out of 5. The lowest two values of involvement (1 and 2) covered 39.1% of replies. The highest two values (4 and 5) accounted for 28.5%.

A similar question asked about how **valued** they felt by their parish. This time the replies were more positive. 31.2% chose the middle value, only 25.4% chose the two lower scores while 43.4% chose the higher scores.

So, though young Catholics attending Mass feel slightly under-involved, most of them do feel valued by their parishes.

### How could your parish make you feel more included?

Top of the list by far was *providing activities specifically for young people*. This included social events, clubs, parties and trips. 29.9% of the 609 individuals who replied here suggested this.

19.4% of the participants identified *involving young people more in Mass and other liturgies*, which includes altar serving, reading, welcoming, liturgy groups, and services specifically for young people.

*Being welcoming* (including remembering names, greeting, smiling, talking to, making feel valued) was the third highest selection with 11.5%.

It is noteworthy that 11.2% indicated, without prompting, that they already feel included.

Factor	%
Activities specifically for us	29.9
Involving more in Mass and liturgy	19.4
Being welcoming	11.5
Involving in existing parish events	11.3
Already feel included	11.2
Making Mass more appealing	10.8
Listening to us	5.4
More practical outreach	5.1
More relevant/inspiring music/hymns	2.6
Other	15.9

**Many of the actual comments confirm that a good proportion of young people do feel very included:** *I feel included as part of my parish already, there are lots of opportunities like reading in Mass, charity work, coffee mornings etc. - I feel as if all the people who attend my parish every Sunday, as do I, are part of my family and I am welcomed into theirs. - I feel like my church does a good job and has a great group of youth and the priest supports us especially in our Lourdes fundraising. - I am an altar server so lots of people say 'well done' to me after the service. - Personally I think my parish makes me feel part of the community because there are people who invite me and who have a very bright personality.*

**Others offer specific suggestions for increased involvement in the liturgy and beyond:** *There could be more roles for young people every week*

*in the parish such as readings, serving and welcoming. Also, once every 6 weeks...all the young people could host an event or lead the majority of the mass. - I could be asked to do readings from the bible or sing a chorus in a hymn or even be asked to hand out cups of teas to the old people. I could do the offertory. - Have more activities that involve younger people and try and stay as up to date as possible with certain things such as social media.*

**Some comment on the relevance of the liturgy itself:** *If it wasn't as boring in the Mass and if the priest didn't hold us in the building for like twenty minutes after the Mass was supposed to have finished. - More modern hymns and some instruments. - The hymns are all sang with a serene and almost bored approach but loving and praising Our Lord should be exciting and energetic and loveable, but it's quite the opposite.*

**Others mention the importance of being integrated into the community:** *It would be nicer to feel part of one OPEN community where the youth don't feel like a different minority group. It makes us a little uncomfortable although my parish do try to be welcoming. - Not patronising young people through treating them like children and not forcing them to go to every related event for 'teenagers' because it singles us out rather than includes us.*

**Several mention practical outreach:** *They could give me more tasks to do that challenge me as a Catholic to be even better and that are to do with helping the people and working with them. - Have more opportunities to learn or do something as a group, e.g. visiting care homes or respite homes. - Helping at charities to show Jesus' example. Young people need to see what the church can offer them. - Make young people more involved and give them opportunities not church related but as in offering how, through the church, they could help the community.*

**Others mention being welcomed, valued and appreciated:** *Make more of the youth welcome, give time to talk to others, this means that people would want to come to Mass more often. - Stop criticism when we make mistakes, despite all of our hard work. - Be nice to young people. - More outreach to young people from Parish and Church Council...would help me to feel more valued, since I would then have a responsibility in the wider future of the Church.*

### Bringing the Faith Alive

We asked young people what else their parish could do to bring the faith alive.

Category	Replies
More varied/vibrant worship	142
More activities for young people	116
More inspiring music/hymns	111
Making people feel more welcome	87
More opportunities to learn about the faith	67
Have a more up to date approach	32
Other	134

The most popular category here was *more varied/vibrant worship*. This covered different styles of worship/prayer, shorter, fun, interactive, more modern/more formal, shorter/longer sermons or teaching. 22.6% commented on this aspect.

The responses to this question showed little difference in the replies of males and females, or between the different ages.

In their own words, many young people expressed their desire for **something different and more engaging**:

- Give new modern outlooks on stories from the bible.
- It's so boring just sitting there listening to someone talking! Why can't we do something more active and creative?
- Don't make the hymns so serious like have a little joy and up beat in hymns.
- Teach faith in a more active and fun way.
- Use modern but still religious music. More stuff like 'The Source' but closer to home.
- Make jokes, homilies shorter, modern hymns, not the same hymns 24/7.
- They could relate their sermons more to everyday life and try to make masses more enjoyable so that people will 'want' to attend mass instead of feeling like they 'have' to because they are baptised into that faith.

Some asked specifically for **activities to help them understand the faith better**:

- Teach us more about the faith.
- I think there should be a group for my age to meet at least once a month to discuss how we can help at mass or in the parish. We could talk about our faith.
- Hold groups in which faith is discussed with young people as many do not understand their faith.
- They could bring it alive by making us do things that make us practise our faith more and could set us challenges like Jesus did with his disciples.

**The relationship with priests was highlighted by some:**

- During mass or after mass the children could talk to the priest and get to know him and ask him questions.
- The priest will usually tell a religious story that has an inspiring moral and he always makes us feel welcomed into the church.
- The priests could be more enthusiastic.

- They could have younger priests to who have a better understanding of young people today.

**Social activities and events were again highlighted:**

- We could sometimes do trips out, bowling etc. to build up friendship with Catholics.
- Maybe something socially for young Catholics on a regular basis not just at times like Youth Sunday/confirmations.
- After Mass, there is free food and drinks in the parish centre containing: tea, biscuits, Coca cola, scones etc. It is also a great opportunity to socialise with other church goers. In addition to this everyone is welcomed.

A small number of comments pointed to issues related to **the limited number of young people involved**:

- The very few people at my school who DO go to church feel like we have to keep it quiet so we don't get frowned upon by other people at school because going to church is seen as uncool or its for 'goodie-2-shoes'.
- I am sure that I would be allowed to go to many parish groups but I wouldn't be comfortable because I would probably be the only teenager.

Once again the **importance of integrating with, and contributing to, the community came through strongly**:

- Try and give everyone a certain type of job in the parish, one that will keep them busy, and make them more responsible to come to Mass. Jobs such as youth council, fundraising, financing, and having a rota for readers and welcomers.
- Make everyone feel part of the community and have groups and activities so more people can get involved.

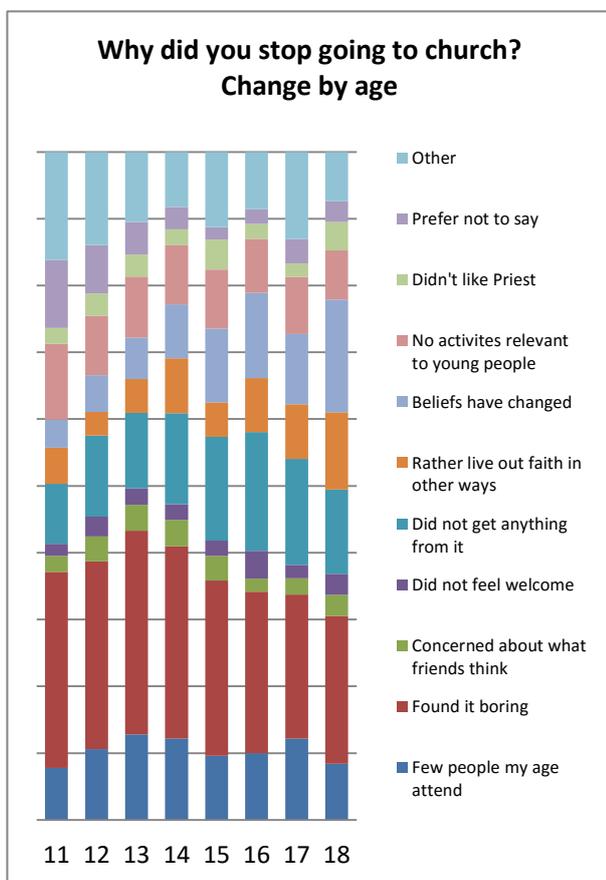


## Those Who No Longer Attend Church

Having asked specific questions of those who attend church, the survey then engaged with those who used to go but no longer do so. There were 1512 young people who gave us responses to this set of questions.

### Why did you stop going to church?

There was a very clear answer to this question. They were *bored* (52.1%), and *did not feel that they got anything from attending church* (26.3%).



*Few people my age attend* was a large factor (21.0%) though peer pressure did not appear to play a great part in their stopping attending – *Concern about what friends think* was selected by only 6.4%.

Other significant responses to this question were:

- *No activities relevant to young people* (17.0%)
- *Beliefs have changed* (16.8%)
- *Rather live out faith in other ways* (12%)

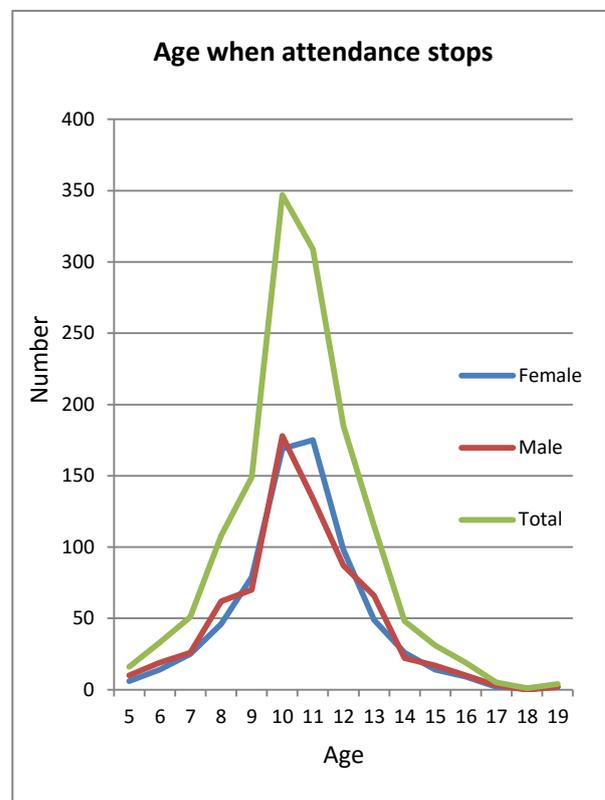
It is encouraging to see that *I did not feel welcome* and *I didn't like the priest*, were selected by very few young people.

The responses to *did not get anything from it*, *rather live out faith in other ways*, and *beliefs have changed* showed a very pronounced increase with age. While, for example, just over 10% of 11-year-olds mentioned *did not get anything out of it*, for the 15-17 year-olds it was over 30%.

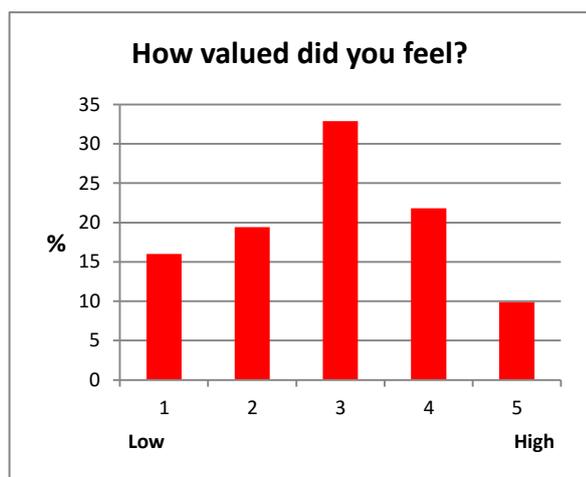
35% of 18-year-olds indicated that their *beliefs had changed* compared with less than 5% of the youngest respondents.

### When did you stop going to church?

We asked this group at what age they stopped attending church regularly. As the graph shows, attendance starts to drop off very early. By the age of 9 over 300 individuals had stopped attending. The point when the largest number stop attending is between 10 and 11 years of age. This is slightly different for boys and girls - for girls it is 11 and for boys 10.



## How valued did you feel in the parish you used to attend?



We asked this group of young people how valued they felt – this time in the parish they *used* to attend. Here, 35.4% felt a value in the lower two ranges, while 31.7% felt more highly valued. This suggests that feeling valued is not, in itself, a good predictor of whether a given individual will continue going to Mass. They also need to feel that they gain something from doing so.

## How could the parish you used to attend make you feel more included?

With another clear message, the response here is for the parish to *provide more activities specifically for young people*. 40.4% of the replies asked for this, with both sexes and all ages agreeing on its prime importance. Next came *making the Mass/church more appealing*, which included aspects like being more relevant or understandable, shorter, more interesting, more fun, less boring, enjoyable etc. (22.2%). Other factors were:

- *Involving young people in existing parish activities* (10.5%)
- *Involving young people more in Mass and liturgies* (10.6%)
- *Listening to us* (4.4%)
- *More opportunities for practical outreach* (2.2%)
- *More relevant/inspiring hymns* (3.0%)

Many of the actual comments offered in reply to this question cover the same themes as the earlier question asked of those who still attend church. Some which stand out here include:

- *Invite young people to participate in the mass, invite them to read or sing or welcome people, instead of just the adults, we want to feel like we're important too.*
- *The older generations could stop judging the way young people choose to look, dress and speak. And it could be made a little bit more entertaining.*
- *There was a lot of elderly people and not many kids my age so I found it scary to have so many strangers around.*
- *Treat us as adults and not like children.*
- *The priest there is one of the best men I've ever met and is engaging.*
- *I think the Parish could make extra activities that teenagers could help with and make them feel a bit more responsible.*
- *They could do more to help children after school because there is a lot of anti-social behaviour in the area.*
- *They could host a church service especially for teenagers (11-19) at a different time to fully explain things in a less fancy way.*
- *When we go to the kids room, don't make the older kids feel stupid because all we did was have 5 mins to colour in a picture of Jesus.*
- *Their views are a little outdated, the masses are rarely relevant to the things I am going through.*
- *We already have a children's liturgy and our Priest is very kind and he makes us feel very welcome as do the volunteers but I think we should have something that would benefit older kids (13-16).*
- *To convert people you have to understand people.*

## Views on the Church Today

In this section of the survey all young people were invited to give their views on the Church in the parish, the school, and the world.

### What do you think is good about the Catholic Church?

There are four key areas that young people identify as particularly good about the Church.

- It is a *community* covering all types of people (49.5%)
- It has a *clear ethos and teaching* (16.1%)
- It offers a *time and place for reflection* (10.1%)
- It offers Masses and other liturgies (6.6%)

The *community aspect* of the Church was particularly important to females; 55.8% mentioned this compared with 43.6% of the males. *Community* also increases in importance with age. At age 11 it scored 45.5%, and at age 17 it was 58.8%.

Those who have never attended Church also picked the same set of good things about the Church. In fact they rated *clear ethos and teaching* at 19.4% - slightly above the general figure of 16%.

We've selected a few of the many specific comments offered in response to this question:

- It provides a community for people from all over the world wherever they are. It's particularly useful for students ... who may have left home for the first time and may be feeling a bit lost. There's a true sense of community and belonging when one attends a mass and gets involved in the parish.*

- The way it is present throughout the world. The completeness of its teaching and it is never afraid to confront modern society.*
- It helps bring many people together and support them in difficult times. It also does a lot to support charities and good causes and finally it helps old people to have a purpose when they are older.*
- I think the priests are very welcoming and accept everyone.*
- The Pope. I really like him. I feel he is a kind person who is running the Church. I like how they raise money for the poor and vulnerable. I really like going to a Catholic school. I love RE.*
- People are welcoming and you get to talk to the elderly as they may be lonely and it is the only chance they get to talk to someone, and it's even nicer if they get to see a young face.*
- It is very peaceful and a nice place to go if a death has occurred or a family member has died.*
- It doesn't appeal to me but it does to others. Others like feeling surrounded by God's presence and confessing.*
- I like how it is one big family.*
- Community, respect and faith.*
- Nothing, in my opinion. I feel without religion there would be less discrimination because there would be no 'this religion is better than that' attitude.*
- When I used to attend church I would like how lovely the priest was and he showed care for everyone. I also like how people can say anything they want in church and nobody will judge them.*
- They hold events outside of mass available to youths, and trips such as ones to Lourdes to help people explore their faith.*

- *It is a community where we learn to live our faith not just 'go to church'. It teaches us how to be good people.*
- *It gives people hope if they feel down or that things are going wrong in their lives.*
- *It is very welcoming, and accepts all.*
- *They help out local people but also people in the global community - they try and get all generations involved, they provide support and advice and they preach good values.*
- *When you are a regular, there seems to be a big sense of community within the church.*
- *Nothing, I think it is boring.*
- *I feel that idea of the Catholic Church is good as it builds people's morals and gives them a sense of community and belonging.*
- *There is some link (although weak) between Catholic schools/churches.*
- *You can admit things you have done wrong and feel forgiven.*
- *I think that the Catholic Church is peaceful - and a quiet place to respond to God.*

### **What would you like to see more of in the Catholic Church?**

There is a clear first choice here. 35% place *more involvement of young people* top of their priority list. This is well ahead of the second choice *better music/hymns* (13.5%).

*More social activity* is next (9.3%), followed by *greater acceptance of modern views* which is mentioned by 7.0%.

*Increased diversity/equality within the Church* had a 4.3% response.

These latter two categories scored relatively low within the whole group but, looking at the age breakdown, they were of increasing importance to the older participants. At age 11 they were each rated 2.2%, but by the age of 18 they were rated at 15.9% and 10.6% respectively.

A small selection of the many specific comments is offered here.

### **Inclusivity and welcoming everyone is clearly an important theme:**

- *Communication between people and more of a welcoming feel.*
- *More tolerance of others. More equality e.g. female priests and married priests.*
- *More accepting of gay marriage.*
- *More of a liberal view concerning issues like abortion etc. - More involved in community outside of the church also, to show it is open and welcoming.*

### **A desire to make things more vibrant and joyful is also expressed:**

- *The Catholic Church could make mass more exciting and interactive. Less judging and misery more happiness and spreading joy. I think the Catholic Church should have more humour, to make people feel welcomed and happy.*
- *A variety in what people do and say and more lively songs. People smiling. It's supposed to be a great moment in people's lives when they receive communion and everyone talks about joy and stuff but never smiles.*
- *Maybe some more happiness, as everyone's usually aggressively solemn.*

### **Requests for a more modern and informal approach come through strongly too:**

- *They could apply it more to modern day life. More modern music could also be used.*
- *For it to be a bit more laid back and not so strict. More modern issues to be spoken about.*
- *Facilities for young people to take advantage of such as Wi-Fi and being able to sit in the church buildings - More comfy seats.*

Many confirm the need to be more involved in Masses and to have more activities that are directly relevant to them:

- More encouragement for younger people to get involved for example art, music, choir etc. More children activities because in my church the children are just hurried off into a separate room just to do colouring.
- Give younger people the chance to get involved with the parish and masses. Maybe give them projects that will keep them interested.
- I think that there should be more activities for teenagers, instead of young children and adults, that don't always cost money such as the Youth Village.

Some make reference to activities to inform and develop their faith:

- I'd like to see some information packs and video clips on what the Catholic Church is all about.
- More beginner-friendly activities for people who don't necessarily know all the prayers and rituals etc. More activities aimed at young people and the teachings explained and delivered on their level of understanding so they can take in the information better rather than be bored tuning out from someone speaking on and on.
- I would like to see more support of teens and young adults who are having a hard time finding time and faith in general in their lives.

The following offers an observer's perspective:

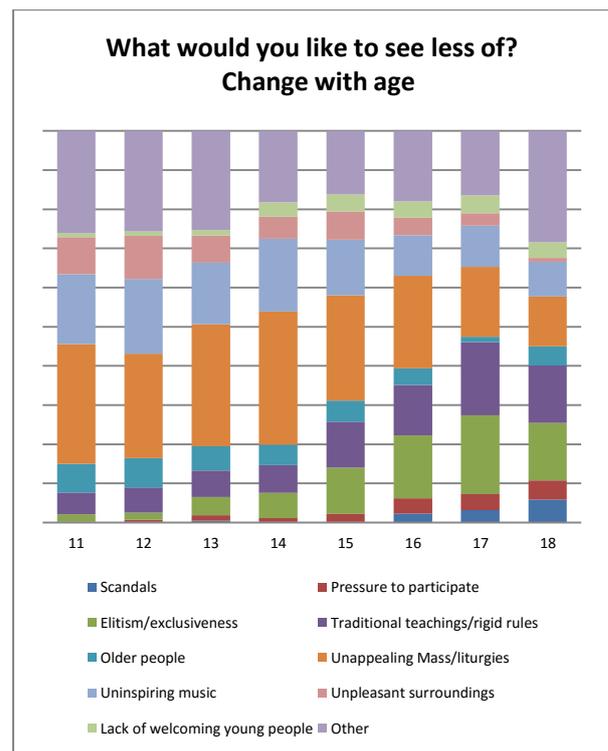
- I think perhaps allowing Church to be a more relaxed environment, where it isn't as formal. Aside from this I don't think I'd want to see much else, the church offers a lot of services and opportunities, and it does good things for a lot of people. Although I'm not religious, I do appreciate what the Catholic Church does for the community.

## What would you like to see less of in the Catholic Church?

Unappealing Mass/liturgy tops the list of what the participants wish to see less of, with just under 30% indicating this. Uninspiring music is next (16.8%).

Other factors rate below 10%. Traditional teaching/rigid rules (9.7%), Elitism and exclusiveness (including homophobia, sexism, discrimination, intolerance, inequality, lack of openness) at 8.1% and unpleasant surroundings (7.7%). A lack of welcoming young people (2.9%), pressure to participate (1.8%) and scandals (0.8%) do not appear to be major concerns of the survey sample.

When looking at the different ages however the picture changes.



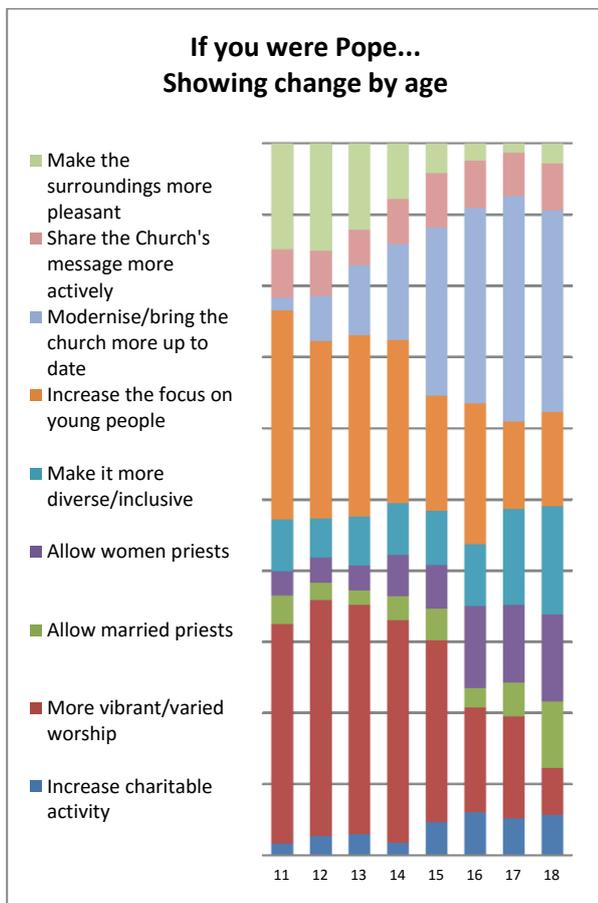
For scandals, pressure to participate, elitism/exclusiveness, and traditional rules, we see their importance rising with age. For 17-year-olds these last two factors become the first and second most important, with unappealing liturgy dropping to third place.



## If you were Pope, what changes would you make to the Catholic Church?

This question prompted wide-ranging comments from the 3627 individuals who made a response. After summarising the comments into a set of categories the most frequently mentioned topic was *More vibrant/varied worship* (23.5%), followed by *increase the focus on young people*. *Modernise/bring the church more up to date* had a 13% response.

As in the previous question, those replying show a marked change in priority as they get older.



At 11 there are just two important factors – *More vibrant worship* (25%) and *increase the focus on the young*. For the 18 year olds, the key priorities are *modernise the church* (28%) and *make it more diverse* (15%).

As they move from 11 to 18 the issues of *worship/music type* and *involvement of the young* reduce quickly in importance, and more general concerns reflecting trends in society begin to

dominate. There is little sign in the responses of any in depth understanding of the Church's position on many of these issues.

Many young people were keen to elaborate on what they would change about the Church if they were in the Pope's position:

- *I would try to make the Catholic Church more down to earth and approachable by speaking to the community through social media and publicity.*
- *I would make sure that everyone no matter what their sexuality felt welcome in the church community.*
- *Get women in charge, allow all aspects of homosexuality, allow divorce, celebrate all individuals regardless of their background or nature and don't discriminate or make them feel outcast.*
- *I would change how the seating is very hard and uncomfortable for the elderly.*
- *I couldn't be Pope, I'm a female. Which I think is highly unfair for religious people who want to be a pope/priest.*
- *I would make the church livelier and more welcoming (it's also very cold so I'd make it warm).*
- *Newer music mixed with older music to meet the needs of all generations.*
- *Get the church doing more charity work: help out with migrant crisis by sending an army of Catholics! That would give the religion a better name in the media.*
- *If I were the pope I would change nothing because it is fine the way it is.*
- *Children being able to go on more trips related to the church so they have a better understanding of the Catholic Community.*
- *I would make priests younger - make them more fashionable.*
- *More God Camps to bring people together.*

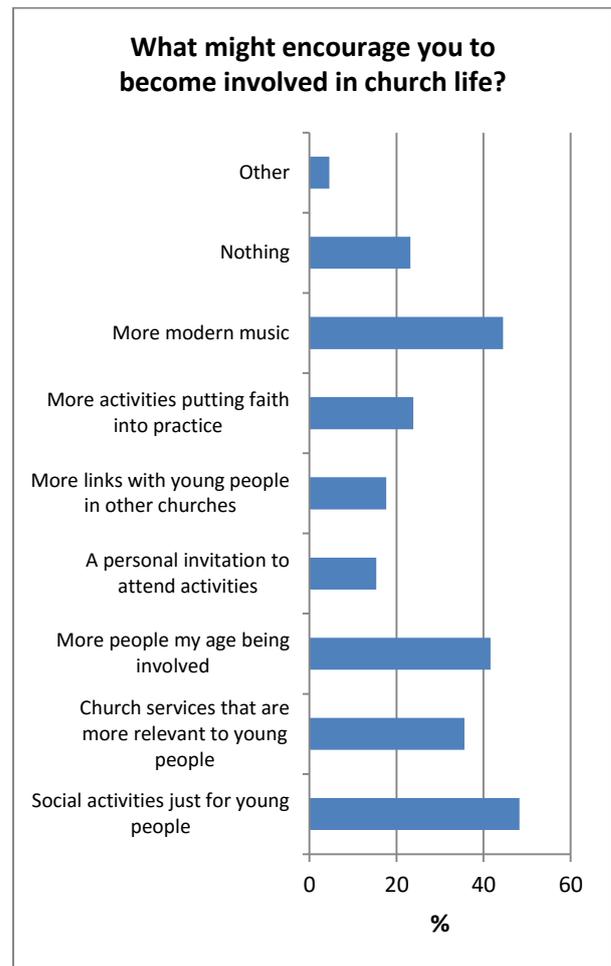
- I wouldn't make any changes because right now the church is a very welcoming and loving environment.
- I would advertise the church in a more open way, making younger people feel more happy to come to church and not be afraid of what their friends think.
- Make a school or place where young people can learn what it's like to be a priest. This would help Newcastle recruit more priests.
- I would scrap it.
- Make it more technologically advanced.
- I would make it a place for young people to show how they feel and get time to spend with the priest to ask for help if they need it.
- Embrace the use of technology and modern science to further be able to spread the word of God and appeal to young people.
- The YMT, SVP are just a few of what create an actual impact in children's lives and we need to see more of it otherwise there will be no 'Church', in my opinion.
- Getting more people involved and making sure that every Catholic Church has at least one priest, one deacon and a couple of altar servers.
- The Church actively going out to spread the Gospel to those who haven't heard it. Encourage them. Let them find God through themselves.
- It would be loud, full of enjoyment and laughter and there would be food!
- More teen activities like the YMT do.
- I would make the priests talk about how we can put Jesus' words into our life.
- I wouldn't be the pope, I'm not inspirational and I'm a bit of a sinner tbh.
- I would change the way the Mass is, I would make it quicker and more fun to be at so more younger people showed up to church.

### What might encourage you to become (more) involved with church life?

Social activities just for young people was the favourite (48.3%), with importance also being put on there being a good number of their peers involved too.

More modern music was high on the list with over 40% of responses.

Social activities were emphasised less by the 17-year-olds (39.7%) than by the younger ages (63.6%).



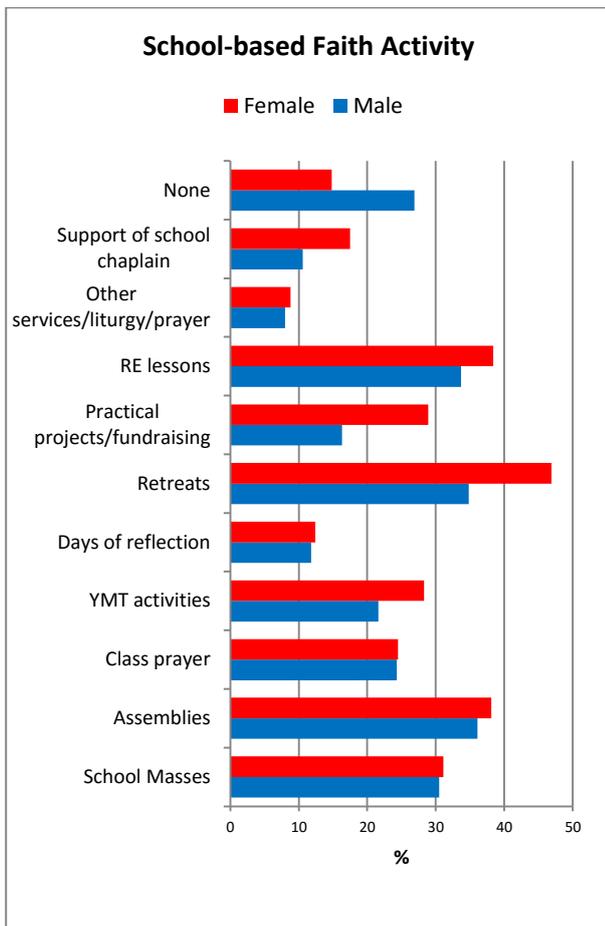
Nearly one third of males (29.2%) said nothing would encourage them to be more involved. For females the figure was 16.4%.

## Faith Experience in Our Schools

With school being the key point of contact with the Catholic community for many of the participants, the survey looked at the way young people see school based activities.

### What school based faith activities are/were most helpful to you?

The most popular activity was *retreats* with 40.5% selecting this. *Assemblies*, and *RE lessons* were second and third. *School Masses* were the other activity that topped 30%.



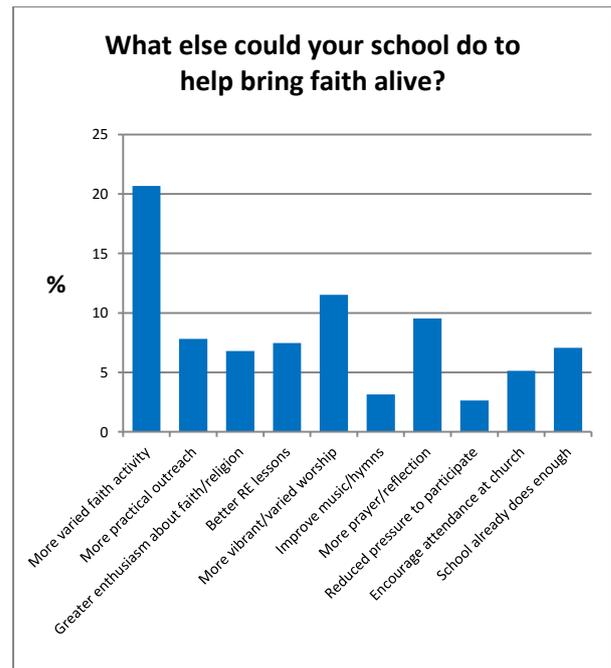
*Assemblies* were the first preference of males, who scored them just above *retreats* (37.0% against 34.8%), where females had *retreats* at 46.9% and *assemblies* at 38.1%.

With increasing age, *school Masses* and *class prayer* become less important. *Retreats* are the most important for older students.

For those who do not normally attend church, *retreats*, *RE lessons* and *assemblies* rate the highest, although this group also rate *none* highly (i.e. no activity is found helpful).

### What else could your school do to help bring faith alive?

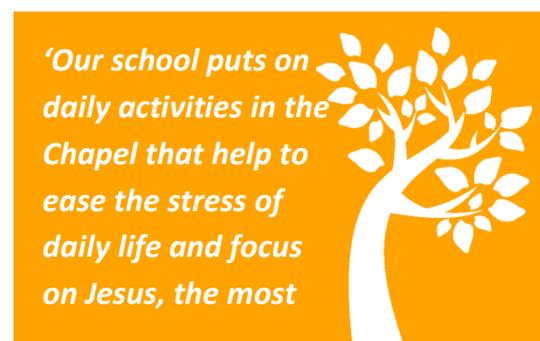
Although there were 2664 responses to this question, none of the categories that the replies were gathered into had a high rating; with the highest being *more varied faith activity* at 20.7%.



A sample of some of the actual words used in response are offered here to give a flavour of the variety and themes covered.

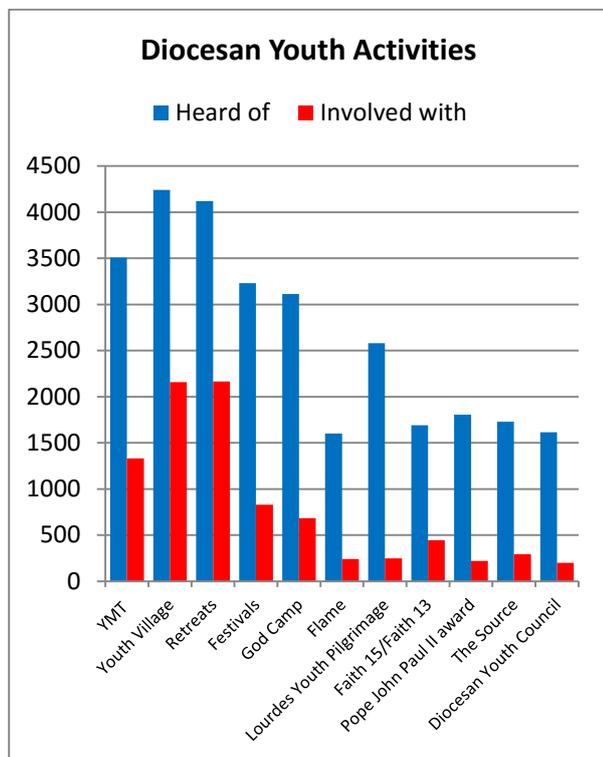
- Never came across morning or evening prayer of the Church, or was exposed to the writing of the popes in encyclicals until I went to university. Should be more of this in schools.*
- Nothing really, they already do a lot it's just hard for them to bring faith alive for people who don't have belief.*
- I'm sure that if I was a religious person then I would consider the school to have done a decent job in terms of 'bringing faith alive', but I am not so I don't really know what the school could do.*

- *Make going to Mass more convenient, as I was never able to have any lunch with Masses.*
- *The RE lessons could be more practical. Faith is a deeply personal thing that should not be forced on young people. Some people find it in later life, others do not; do not force it on the unwilling.*
- *More retreats. More serious RE lessons.*
- *Do projects and fun activities outside or as large groups about faith and not just in classes or lessons.*
- *More priests involved.*
- *Teach more on the ceremony of "mass" to help more people understand it. A retreat that doesn't exclude - don't have to pay for.*
- *RE lessons are really boring. It is stuff we already know and are just relearning it.*
- *I really enjoyed our Year 8 retreat.*
- *Focus more on the positive aspects of R.E rather than constantly talking and teaching about sinning and being sinners.*
- *Have more religious trips and getting the children more involved in the masses.*
- *Make mass more appealing to my age group and get students more involved e.g. students can ask questions.*
- *Not force us to believe in religion. Allow us to share our opinion and not be told we're wrong.*
- *Nothing, I have had a good Catholic upbringing, it is purely my own beliefs which have led to my lack of faith.*
- *More modern versions of songs like Faith 13/15.*
- *Make faith less of a taboo by introducing it more to people so it isn't weird to be religious.*
- *Nothing, it can't get any more faithful - if it did it'd be a church.*
- *Prayer at the end of the day.*
- *My school does lots of things to help bring faith alive.*
- *I believe they have done all they can to give me the option of following a faith but have not managed to fully interest me.*
- *Show how religion can be applied in real life situations.*
- *Explain what Catholicism is in the language that younger people understand.*
- *Bringing older students in to do dramas about religious experiences, to help your understanding.*
- *We had a chaplain but no longer have one. We need one back!*
- *I really enjoy the end of year service as groups of dancers perform a piece representing scripture - I wish activities like this were included more in every day school life as it's a great, fun way to learn about religion.*
- *Teach values that are relevant to today's society, rather than society 2000 years ago.*
- *More educational religious trips such as The Youth Village.*
- *I believe they could do more masses more frequently because we very rarely have masses.*
- *Take us out more for fundraising events so we can get involved and instead of just sitting in school discussing issues and how we can solve them, we could go out and physically be involved.*
- *I did a piece of art and it was put on display at Durham Cathedral about mercy. I think it was a good way to show what mercy might mean.*



## Youth Activities in the Diocese

There is a wide range of youth events and activities available for young people in the diocese. The survey asked how many had *heard of* these and whether they had been *involved* with them.



All items listed had at least 30% recognition among the young people. Five of the aspects (YMT, Youth Village, Retreats, Festivals and 'God Camp') had been heard of by over 50%.

Many of the events are targeted at specific age groups, and this shows up when we look at the responses of particular ages. Youth Village Retreats and 'God Camp' are recognised by over 80% of the older individuals.

As would be expected, the level of *involvement* reported in each activity varies. For the Youth Village and Retreats over 50% of those who have heard of them had also taken part in related activities. YMT events have a 38% involvement; Faith 13/15 has 26% and Festivals 26% with 'God Camp' at 22%.

The Source (17%), Flame (15%) and John Paul II Award (12%) are next in order with the Diocesan

Youth Council and Lourdes Youth Pilgrimage showing 12% and 10%.

Among its target group of older students, the take up of the Lourdes Pilgrimage is higher, reaching 22% among 18-year-olds.

Some of the actual words from young say it all:

- I found the Festivals and God Camp very beneficial and got a lot of young people involved in the church and thinking about their faith.*
- God camp should be put on for all ages in high school. If I had the chance to go every year I definitely would, and a lot of other people would.*
- We went to this god camp like a youth village with the school, like a festival and we thought it may be quite boring but it were actually really good because we sang and danced and did fun activities.*

## The Last Word

This survey report presents us with many messages - some of these are encouraging and some are very challenging. Yet it is only a short summary of an enormously rich collection of observations from young people in our diocese – a resource that we can all continue to draw upon and learn from as we move forward.

Their responses show that many young people, while expressing dissatisfaction with some of what they see and experience, do want to be fully engaged and to journey with us in faith – as long as we can provide them with the tools to do so. The next page offers some starting points but the words of one young person are more direct:

***'I would like you to take on board and think about this survey I have answered and the changes that could be made. I am just giving you some ideas that could possibly increase your community.'***

## What Next?

...or how might we respond to what this survey is telling us?



This report presents a summary picture of the views of well over 5,000 young people aged between 11 and 19 - the vast majority of whom attend Catholic schools in our diocese. Many have never regularly attended a Catholic Church. Some used to attend but no longer do so – and some are enhancing and enlivening our parishes every weekend. We have a lot to learn from each of them.

In our schools and parishes we may be able to recognise some of what they are telling us. Perhaps we can all consider their messages and think about how we might respond as individuals, as parish and school worshipping communities, and as a diocese.

***Some of the many things we may wish to reflect on and pray about include:***

- How do we relate to those who come to us for the Sacraments?
- How best do we involve them in the life of our community in the future?
- How do we welcome young people? How many do we know by name?
- For the young people we have in our parishes, how could we include them more in the parish community - both socially and liturgically?
- How could we make them feel more involved and valued?
- How do we allow them to exercise responsibility and make practical contributions to the parish?
- How can we share a lively and vibrant faith with them?

- For those that are only loosely part of our communities, how might we encourage them to become closer to us? How can we help them grow in faith rather than drift away?
- Young people are not all the same, and the needs of different ages and sexes can be very diverse. Do we provide a suitable range of opportunities for them both socially and in learning about and practising their faith?
- How do we make provision for helping older teens in meeting the challenges to their faith from society?
- How can we encourage our young people to be involved in the many faith development opportunities we already have? What others should we be providing?
- How do we benefit from, and support, the work of the Youth Ministry Team and other youth activities in the diocese?
- How might schools and parishes work hand-in-hand on these issues?
- Do we smile and laugh enough as a parish community with our young people?

*... and, no doubt, there are other areas that you will identify as being important to your own circumstances which warrant thought, discussion, prayer and action.*





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FORWARD TOGETHER  
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