

Summary

Strengths

- Structure, length and frequency of Mass including succinct and clear homilies;
- Family friendly and welcoming Parish;
- Good number of people regularly attending Mass;
- Good Church and school building which are closely located
- Variety of activities already taking place e.g. flowers, tea & coffee, foodbank, web site; musicians & choir
- Financial administration including gift aid.
- SVP
- CAFOD
- Generosity of parishioners with their money and time.
- Great commitment from a variety of people supporting Church based activities including readers, altar servers, Eucharistic Ministers, choir, musicians, flower arrangers and cleaners.

Improvements

- Remodel the Parish Centre to allow for wider access and better use of the facility e.g. socials
- Improve exterior & interior of Church e.g. cleaning of statue on roof, visibility of notice board.
- Allow access to Church during the day for private prayer – this may require some remodelling / expenditure.
- Have signage which is visible from the road so that people know who and where we are.
- Activities to encourage children / youth involvement e.g. dedicated youth worker, brownies / cubs etc.
- Additional social groups and events to encourage more of us to come together outside of Mass.
- Parish Priest to be involved in activities through his participation and attendance at events other than Mass.
- Visibility of how to get involved in activities, key contacts and regular encouragement to join.
- Better use of social media and our web site
- Introduce different celebrations of the Mass for example Family Mass, children's liturgy
- More joint parish and school initiatives e.g. readers, musicians, choir, prayer groups, Mini Vinnies.
- More people supporting music and choir.
- Better use of music through expansion of repertoire of hymns, sung responses within Mass and choir singing more regularly.
- Evangelisation both within and outside the catholic community
- Employ a parish secretary.
- Help individuals and groups to develop their personal faith in different ways to encourage evangelisation (without putting people off). This may include retreats, pilgrimages, prayer groups and bible studies either face to face or via internet.
- Get to know the parish more through things like parish census, questionnaires, parish meetings, home visiting and welcoming newcomers.
- Link up activities within other parishes and the Diocese.

The summary above is not an exhaustive list of all the great comments below.

Parish Responses 3 – 8th May 2016

Buildings/Enablers/Infrastructure

Good

- Church building is modern and lends itself to a variety of worship models.
- Buildings – school and parish both in good physical shape
- We have an attractive modern church and parish centre with large financial reserves.

Improve

- Signpost to St. Vincent's church
- Do we have a parish council?
- Minibus?
- Narthex is often cold, dark and unwelcoming
- How will closing churches impact on our church capacity?
- Refurbish parish centre toilets and the rooms
- Social events in our refurbished parish centre!
- Parish centre should be better integrated into the local community
- Use of parish centre in the daytime for coffee/meetings/young mothers and all community
- Door security on hall inner door when playgroup in action so that lounge can be used for funerals etc.
- Need a licence for the parish centre? Income/social gatherings
- Parish centre space is underused
- Access to the Church. Why not make the access from the narthex to the church proper reasonably secure and allow access for private prayer during the day. We can easily afford the capital cost- maybe a CCTV with possible supervision by part-time secretary (See 5 below)
- We make no obvious effort to make the exterior look welcoming. The church has 40 years of pollution so it is difficult to tell what the original colour of the stonework was. The statue of Our Lord on the roof is in dire need of cleaning; we don't even notice it anymore but passers-by certainly do. There is little to spell out to passers-by that it is a church let alone suggest to people that they might possibly be welcome. We need a large sign so that even passing drivers can pick up at a glance that we are St Vincent's RC Church. I have just been to a funeral at Sacred Heart and, with the benefit of a regular collection for Development Funds, they have made an especially welcoming feeling about the church.

Parish Responses 3 – 8th May 2016

Groups/Activities

Good

- SVP
- Lots of activities available to join e.g. liturgy, flowers, choir, SVP, coffee after church etc. – but it's a 2 way process you have to make the move yourself!
- We have a large number of groups though we have to accept that the picture is a bit deceptive in that it gives an impression of large numbers of people involved. Most are older people who typically are involved in 3 or 4 different activities.
- We have a congregation of many willing volunteers.

Improve

- Youth worker
- Encouragement from father and others to promote activities/publicise and encourage from the altar
- Bacon sandwiches on a Sunday (well done, fat cut off please)
- How do people know how to get involved? Can a meeting for people who want to get involved?
- Wider involvement in liturgy groups
- Develop children's liturgy e.g. monthly
- Outings, not just for the elderly but whole range of ages
- Free community nutrition and fitness club
- Walking club
- Summer event
- Gardening rota on a regular basis
- Eco 'green' group
- Facebook page/group = powerful communication & twitter
- Better market what's on to the wider community i.e. toddler group Facebook/twitter
- Advertise all parish activities in the newsletter
- It would be good to see Fr Paul join us at coffee morning (Sundays if no baptisms)
- Lately dead – a photo of the person be put up in the porch so that the parishioners are more aware.
- While celebrating the Mass together is central to our faith, to be the 'People of God' we need to know and support one another. A parish which has such a high Mass attendance as ours is strangely lacking in any organised social functions which would allow large groups of parishioners to meet together in a situation other than attendance at Sunday Mass. By social functions I do not mean occasions such as coffee after Mass. How do we ever get to know and support each other as a parish? Is our parish really just a Mass centre rather than a social unit sharing common beliefs and ideals?
- Encouragement of the people to participate in activities from the priest would be very welcome.
- Reminding people (including welcoming visitors) that there is tea and coffee after mass in Parish Centre.
- Distribute newsletter at end of Mass instead of the beginning to encourage people to take it home as a reminder of what is going on in the parish for the rest of the week.
- There is a limited sense of community in that (it is only my impression) there is no obvious social life that centres on our Catholic community. If the school runs events then it might be possible to expand them to run with the support of parishioners and target both parents and other parishioners. Race Nights, wine tasting, St Patricks night, Sixties nights etc. We could afford to subsidise events for a limited time. I'm sure moving some Catenian social events to our Parish and opening them to a wider audience among parishioners might be an area worth investigating. Young mothers can be a group that really need support.

Parish Responses 3 – 8th May 2016

Pastoral/Liturgy/Worship

Good

- Homilies are good – succinct & with a clear message
- Good Mass attendance Sunday/Weekday
- SVP
- School/pre-school
- Sermons well-rehearsed and pertinent
- Good homilies – always to the point
- Welcoming parish
- Friendliness of people
- Numbers at mass
- Priest friendly and approachable
- Attendance at services
- Very good altar servers – they do a super job!
- Length of mass
- 3 masses
- Efficient mass and well disciplined
- Readers
- Eucharistic ministers
- Welcome group
- Spiritual leader
- Father Paul
- I think the strength of the parish is very good. The pastoral needs of the parish is very good now as the SVP do a lot of good work now, visiting the sick and housebound people and helping families who need help.
- There is a great Mass attendance but sometimes a lack of joy in our worship.
- We have one of the highest numbers of Mass attendance in the Diocese.
- Our care of the sick is good.

Improve

- Do we always know our sick? We'd like to pray for them by name
- Could we explore different ways of celebrating the mass?
- Family masses could be instituted to build a stronger involvement of the young with their families. Children to do the readings, music etc.
- Ask school to encourage their good readers to read at Mass
- Prayer groups/reflections planned throughout the year
- Children's liturgy
- Children's liturgy within Mass times
- Consider a monthly Mass that permits a children's liturgy to be included. Start small scale
- Reach out to housebound by having Sunday Mass online
- Signing the Mass for the deaf – maybe it will bring more in?
- Rotation of available priests
- Arrange young inspiring missionaries to speak to the young – possibly during Mass times?
- Music – Organists/musicians/choir
- There is a lovely choir but it only functions at Christmas and Easter. It could help to be leading the congregation more frequently.

Parish Responses 3 – 8th May 2016

- Allow choir master / musicians to use 5 – 10 minutes before Mass to practice new hymns to extend our repertoire. This would also help reduce the talking / noise before Mass. E.g. 'congregation practice' is held at 8:45 – 8:55am leaving 5 minutes for quiet reflection.
- We are blessed in having 2 organists and 2 sets of guitarists who cover all masses but it would be nice to encourage more involvement of younger musicians.
- Music in the Liturgy seems to have been pared back to a minimum and the minimum should not be a 4 hymn sandwich. We should be singing the Alleluia, Psalms, the parts of the mass including acclamation at consecration.

Parish Responses 3 – 8th May 2016

Wider Community / Evangelisation

Good

- Foodbank
- Eucharistic Ministers
- SVP
- CAFOD – occasional collections only
- Generosity of parishioners – practical, financial, foodbank
- Tea & Coffee after Mass.
- Lead by example – numbers seen at Mass
- There is an energy and thirst in St Vincent's parish to be more involved in parish life and reaching out to the wider community.

Improve

- Signs on road to indicate that there is a Catholic Church here
- Signpost to include Mass times so people know where we are.
- We are already a multi-cultural parish. How can we attract more like minded people? Maybe monthly meetings in the parish centre.
- Have we lost the younger parish members compared with earlier years - target the teenagers when they are soon lost to the faith.
- Initial approach – leaflet to non UK church members to invite them to multi-cultural events here is the parish.
- Try to integrate youth into the parish – How? Encourage them to mix more with the adults at attempt to become integrated as a parish.
- Suggest also the re-integration of single older parishioners for example organising trips to shows etc.
- Perhaps more functions centred around the church and other churches in the area could improve community spirit.
- Evangelisation beyond our 'comfortable' is not really happening.
- Need to identify those lukewarm Catholics for evangelisation
- Find out more about SVP – what do they do and what opportunities are there for us to be included.
- Introduce 'Mini Vinnies' from school into the parish.
- Social media to communicate events etc. but also to spread the Word.
- Family events / disco / socials / something to bring families together
- Strong expression of belief that the current plan to reduce to 75 parishes is fundamentally wrong. What is the justification for this suggested action? If we are retaining 98 priests why not 98 parishes? We feel that we may lose many more Catholics if their church goes.
- We need to be more pro-active in our evangelisation. How can we do it?
- Integrate newcomers to the parish – need to make them more welcome.
- Can we improve sacramental program?
- Do we really know those who do need our help / how can we reach them.
- Diversity – are we a middle class parish?
- Involve school with church music at weekend Masses to encourage children and families.
- Do we work with / communicate with other Catholic parishes.
- Can we compete with "Mindfulness" – seeing 'church' as therapy?
- There is some excellent activity via the SVP. This could be widened to the wider community so that the Parish as a whole could be involved in reaching out to refugees and asylum seekers in our town.
- There is an excellent vehicle with CAFOD, well supported by Bishop John, to reach out to the wider world. With encouragement and support from the priest, this could be further developed in St Vincent's.

Parish Responses 3 – 8th May 2016

- Big Pilgrimages are great! Could we have some local ones? Day retreats, weekend retreats for couples / families / readers / Eucharistic ministers / musicians all of which would refresh and re-energise us.
- **Year of Mercy – The Missing Thousands.**

We could take our lesson from the parable of the Good Shepherd. We do standing room only for Christmas, Easter and First Communion but it is rare to have full pews at other times. Where are the missing numbers?

Start with our own flock and see what we can do for those, who are serious danger of being lost to God. Our Missionary activity has got to start with those who seldom attend and who should be the first target of any missionary activity. Then there are the Catholics in name only; in our parish we appear to have an enormous number of lapsed or non-practising Catholics, Maybe there as many as a couple of thousand but the truth is that most of us really do not know and we won't go very far without an ability to identify and target specific individuals.

In other dioceses I am aware of parish groups, whose specific responsibility is to identify any newcomers to the parish and make a specific effort to interest them in the social and practical activities of the parish. A Parish Census could establish with some degree of accuracy The Catholics (practising & non-practising) who live in the Parish.

Their skills and their willingness to contribute these skills to the Parish.

Of course the question is how we deal with this information once we get it. We would need to have an analysis of the total non-attenders, the lukewarm and the regulars. We could look to establish a list of those whose skills and experience might be called on for the benefit of the parish. It could well be that we need to restore the transport service for whatever arrangements come from the Diocesan Re-structuring. This could be impractical as the regulations for minibus drivers have changed enormously since we last ran the service (per Bernard Lonergan).
- **Pastoral Needs and assistance for the laity**

We no longer have our clergy home visiting; we do not have the numbers. Deacons are one way. Lay visitors could be a possibility but most of us do not have the skills to deal effectively with the arguments of those who take a lot of their moral reasoning from TV. With this in mind we (or at least I do) need a massive improvement in skills to deal with the barriers put up by those, who are not easily persuaded to return to the practice of the Faith. In my limited experience, any inability on my part to answer their objections is seen as a total confirmation in their eyes that the church cannot answer their logic. Are there specific training programmes available? I would prefer internet based programmes that I can study in my own time and refer to for specific queries.

There is no point in setting a target for the moon. We are setting ourselves up for failure if we don't get our own house in order first.

If we start by building up our sense of community among the regular Mass goers, then we can work to attract the lukewarm – those we can identify with reasonable certainty as occasional attenders. Once people are inside and feeling more positive to the church, we can look to improve their Mass attendance and participation in the life of the Church. Then we look to the lapsed and the total outsiders

Parish Responses 3 – 8th May 2016

Administration

Good

- Website useful for newcomers
- Good accountant
- Gift Aid
- Financial position strong
- Admin is good
- Envelopes & counting team.

Improve

- Priest / Administrator – should be delegated more to the laity
- Better communication around what is already in place and events that are arranged.
- Lay people encouraged to take on admin roles – have more access to admin roles
- Point of contact during the day – someone to deal with requests etc.
- Parish secretary to help Father Paul
- The priest will be even busier in the future. There should be e.g.
 - A group for bereavement (i.e. support for funerals etc.)
 - A paid secretary to support with admin for the priest
 - Groups to support preparation for different sacraments - not instead of the priest but to add to the provision and lessen workload on the priest
 - Visit families etc.
- How can we make the noticeboard more accessible
- Website is good – however could be improved
- Social media to highlight the groups / events
- Great ideas witnessed in other parishes around the country should be welcomed / encouraged and embraced e.g.
 - Parish Groups / Committee to be responsible for areas of admin / finance / social activities, Liturgy Groups, Speakers at Mass, Parish newsletter / magazine
- Communication is a problem area. We should have a parish secretary (say 3 hours per day) responsible for fielding phone calls, maintaining a diary, arranging times of baptisms and funerals & sick calls and all the administrative duties that contribute to Fr. Paul's excessive workload. For other times an answering service, which gives Mass times etc.
- In general less than half our weekly collection is gift aided. There are too many misunderstandings about the activity. You have to give the promised amount every week. If you miss out than it will be noted. If you don't give enough then you will be looked down on. It is amazing how wrong some opinions are. We cannot continue to neglect the needs of the Church; we may not need the money but other parishes are in poor circumstances. In a month a small group could improve the situation immensely with a programme setting out to update all records with sealed envelope response.

Parish Responses 3 – 8th May 2016

Children / Youth

Good

- Family friendly.

Improve

- Need a youth group – why not a paid youth leader with volunteers to support them improve youth involvement
- Support the children – let them bring the offertory, have their own hymns, have a suitable sermon once a month.
- Raise awareness of other opportunities in the Diocese – Reignite, Lourdes Pilgrimage, Nightfever
- Don't miss out "young adults" e.g. post university, people in their 20's / early 30's.
- Identify opportunities for youth within existing 'related groups' – could they be given a role e.g. tea & coffee
- Facilities for young people as they leave junior school and move to high school – Groups to attract them.
- Youth group – engaging post Year 3 both children & parents.
- Children's Youth Group – inclusive of other Faiths.
- Rainbows / Brownies / Guides / Beavers / Cubs / Scouts?
- Pre school hours increased (2017 – early years funding increases to 30 hours).
- Where are the youth for this meeting? If we don't have their input we are wasting our time.
- Could improve children's involvement in the liturgy
- Fundraising from within the young of our community – bringing them together with a purpose.
- Consider a youth retreat – could this be at a deanery level.
- Extra Mass for children at Christmas. Midnight Mass at Midnight.
- More class Masses on a Sunday with children having roles.
- How can we engage teens better?
- Would a Sunday school work?
- Sunday school during Service
- Should a family Mass be offered at 11 am or a children's area?
- Are there people e.g. young Mum's with kids etc. who would appreciate a "Mass taxi" rota to bring them to Mass. We could get some booster seats.
- Music – encourage young people to play / sing in choir
- Encourage younger people / children – specific roles, readers, counters, servers etc.
- Links between the School and parish could be strengthened through:
 - CAFOD
 - Fairtrade
 - School / Parish events
 - Children's Sunday Liturgies
 - Other Children's Seasonal Liturgies that are not necessarily school based (Christingle for example)
- Great ideas witnessed in other parishes around the country should be welcomed / encouraged and embraced e.g. Youth activities with a qualified youth worker.
- The most obvious omission is that I cannot identify anything whatsoever to promote socialising among young parishioners. Youth Groups would be a great start. We have the money. Why not pay a reasonable salary for a person to take on the part time job of running a Youth Club once a week? I do not doubt for one minute that there would be sufficient numbers of parents, who would be willing and well capable of assisting in organisation and supervision. However few parents have

Parish Responses 3 – 8th May 2016

enough spare time to take on the full responsibility for organisation and supervision. We have no religious groups apart from Young SVP.