



**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE NEW
EVANGELISATION: A CASE STUDY OF CATHOLIC
PRIMARY SCHOOL PARENTS IN
ENGLAND AND WALES**

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Executive Summary

This research study aims to address the need to provide empirical research about opportunities for positive engagement with Catholics who do not regularly attend Sunday Mass in England and Wales. The study builds on insights gained from the Bishops' Conference 'Crossing the Threshold' conferences, and the work of the national core group for ministry and outreach to non-churchgoing Catholics¹. Many baptised Catholics do not regularly attend Mass; however, they are involved in Catholic education, social action, and youth work. This research focuses on evangelisation, in particular, the spiritual needs and interests, the faith and practice of young Catholic parents of children in Catholic primary schools in England and Wales. This research will explore the Catholicity of Catholic parents; it will investigate what existing connections they value with the Catholic Church; and consider how the Catholic Church could strengthen its relationship with them, in encouraging the sharing of the gifts and talents that they bring to the Body of Christ. The chosen research method is a qualitative case study - a method which generates rich data to complement and illuminate the narrative behind statistics. This method involves in-depth semi-structured interviews, and a self-completed survey of a selection of parents at Catholic primary schools. The report produced from the analysis of data outlines the findings and reflects on the implications for future practice and policy in the area of the Catholic Church's evangelistic outreach, pastoral ministry and mission. This in-depth qualitative research study of the religious beliefs, attitudes and practices of parents in Catholic primary schools, aims to assist the work of the New Evangelisation; it aims to serve and benefit those who will shape the future of the Catholic Church in England and Wales.

Research Questions

How do Catholic parents in England and Wales currently express their Catholic Faith?

Why do these Catholic parents seek a Catholic primary school education for their children?

Why do many Catholic primary school parents attend or not attend weekly Sunday Mass?

What do these Catholic parents value about what Catholicism has to offer and how would these Catholic parents wish to grow in faith and re-connect with parish life?

¹ <http://www.cbcew.org.uk/crossing-the-threshold>

1. Research Context

Introduction

A perceived decline in church affiliation and church attendance in England and Wales has been well documented (Brierley, 2005, 2010; Brown, 2001; Voas and Crockett, 2005). Recent YouGov surveys designed by Linda Woodhead suggest that around 50% of Catholics never or rarely attend church (Woodhead, 2014). However, there is some evidence to the contrary: ‘London now has higher rates of religious practice than the rest of the country, reversing the usual pattern of urban decline versus rural fidelity’ (Sweeney, 2013, p.150). Whatever the true picture, a decline in church attendance can be viewed not as an embracing of secularism, but in terms of de-traditionalisation and de-institutionalisation; religion is not disappearing it is just metamorphosing and transforming (Davie, 2000; Hervieu-Léger, 2000). The Catholic Faith is still present and lived, but is not necessarily manifested and expressed in the traditional means of measuring such faith, i.e. through affiliation to church and attendance at Sunday Mass.

New Evangelisation

Evangelisation...is a complex process made up of varied elements: the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative.
(*Evangelii Nuntandi*, n.24)

In essence, evangelisation is the proclamation of the Gospel and is an activity that all Christians are mandated to do; ‘Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation’ (Mark 16:15). For the Catholic Church, there is ‘a profound link between Christ, the Church and evangelisation’ (*Evangelii Nuntandi*, n.16). The Catholic Church has recognised there is a need for a new response in its work of mission because it is facing a ‘critical cultural challenge to the life and practice of faith’. A positive response ‘is for the Gospel to engage with culture itself, the dynamics of culture, in other words evangelisation of culture’ (Sweeney, 2013, p. 155).

According to Archbishop Rino Fisichella, (President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelisation), the term New Evangelisation was first employed by Saint Pope John Paul II in a homily at Nova Huta in 1979 (Fisichella, 2012, p.20). Saint John Paul II (1990) emphasised that New Evangelisation is relevant:

Particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger Churches as well, where entire groups of baptised have lost the living sense of faith or even no longer recognise themselves as members of the church, leading an existence, which is far from Christ and from his Gospel. (*Redemptoris Missio*, n.34)

New Evangelisation is not new in content; the Christian message is, as stated in Hebrews 13:8, ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and always’ (Fisichella, 2012, p.49). Nor is it a radically new concept; it draws on themes found in Second Vatican Council documents, and in Blessed Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975).

Pope Benedict XVI re-emphasised the call for New Evangelisation, recognising a need for a ‘renewed missionary drive’ because people are distancing themselves from the Faith (Fisichella, 2012, p.7). The 2012 Synod of the Ordinary General Assembly of Bishops in Rome reflected on the theme of ‘the New Evangelisation and the Witness to the Christian Faith’. The Synod explored ways to put New Evangelisation into practice (Fisichella, 2012, p.3), recognising that it is aimed at ‘the baptised in our communities who are experiencing a new existential and cultural situation, which, in fact, has imperilled their faith and their witness’ (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n.15). Of key relevance to this research is the emphasis on Mass at the centre of Catholic life, ‘the Eucharist must be the source and summit of the New Evangelisation’ (Synodus Episcoporum Bulletin, 2012, n.34). However, it must be stressed that New Evangelisation is ‘...not a programme. It is a way of thinking, seeing and acting. It is a lens through which are viewed opportunities to proclaim the Gospel anew’ (Wuerl, 2013, p.129). It demands changes in ‘relationships among the faithful’ (McCallion & Maines, 2009, p.67). The Synod of Bishops suggested a variety of methods to implement the New Evangelisation: a focus on initial proclamation; teaching about a living encounter with Christ with opportunities offered for the study of the scripture; education, and constructive use of social media. Popular piety should be encouraged in the form of pilgrimages and the Catholic parish should emphasise missions, renewal, retreats and adult catechesis. The latter is

essential because New Evangelisation cannot develop if catechesis of adults is non-existent, fragmented, weak, or neglected. Of particular relevance to this research is the role of Catholic schools in evangelisation (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n.134).

New Evangelisation in England and Wales

One of the ways that the Catholic Church in England and Wales has given practical expression to the New Evangelisation is through an initiative called ‘Crossing the Threshold’. The project was commissioned by the Bishops' Conference Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis and has been developed by a national core group², coordinated by the Bishops' Home Mission Desk. The ‘Crossing the Threshold’ (CTT) initiative, which has a specific focus on the ministry and outreach to non-churchgoing Catholics, was publicly launched in November 2011 and since then there have been six free CTT day conferences for parishes in the five provinces of England and Wales. The aim of each conference was to highlight the importance of this area of pastoral ministry, to provide an opportunity for people to explore the issues, to share experiences and to receive information about resources. Following these conferences, resources have been developed to aid parishes in developing parish-based evangelisation initiatives³. This research project is designed to build on that work: it aims to give a voice to those baptised Catholics who are distant from parish life. The hope is that it will inform future planning for ministry and outreach to non-churchgoing Catholic parents of primary school children.

Catholics on the Edges

The Catholic community in England and Wales was traditionally viewed as a strongly bonded community centred on the parish and the priest, an all-embracing community, with parish organisations, which satisfied a Catholic's needs from cradle to grave; being a Catholic was involuntary and immovable, part of one's intrinsic identity (Hornsby-Smith, 2004, p.44). However, the Catholic community is not homogenous and never has been. It embraces generational differences, class, ethnic, theological differences, infrequent attendees, and non-

² National core group: Alpha for Catholics; Archdiocese of Southwark; Caritas Social Action Network; Catholic Evangelisation Services; Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales; Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle; Diocese of Nottingham; Diocese of Portsmouth; Home Mission Desk; Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales – Secretariat; Keeping In Touch (KIT); Landings UK; Maryvale Institute; National Board of Catholic Women (NBCW); RCIA Network.

³ Crossing the Threshold: <http://www.cbcew.org.uk/crossing-the-threshold>

attendees at church (Hornsby-Smith, 1987, 2004). In the last fifty years, there has been a weakening of the distinctive Catholic subculture, an increasing lack of visible barriers and differences between the Catholic community and secular society. (Hornsby-Smith, 1987, p.214; McLaughlin, T., 1996, p.13; Flint, 2007, p.253).

The definition of a practising Catholic used by the Catholic Church focuses on attendance at weekly Sunday Mass; this is an ecclesial obligation. However, Catholic practice is difficult to measure as significant numbers of baptised Catholics do not attend Sunday Mass or attend less regularly but still self-identify as practising Catholics. This is not a new situation. Some commentators agree that a much narrower understanding of the Catholic community, focusing only on regular Sunday Mass-goers (McGrail, 2004), results in an inclusive/exclusive model of parish community. A focus solely on Sunday Mass attendance could be seen as a church centric measure and an 'equating of Christian faith with frequent participation in church activities' (Walker, 2011) as a narrow measurement and interpretation of Catholic identity and practice. However, it must be recognised that weekly Mass attendance is an ecclesial obligation and 'if one does not participate in the most central and meaningful ritual of the community, can one be said to belong to that community' (Engebretson, 2014, p.5).

A variety of terms is employed within the Catholic Church and in academic literature to describe the baptised Catholic who no longer regularly attends Mass: non-churchgoing; lapsed; non-practising; unchurched; de-churched; sacramentalised not evangelised, and a cafeteria Catholic. These terms are frequently used disparagingly in contrast to the more positive terms of active; practising; committed; and core Catholic. Hornsby-Smith (1991) in his study of Catholics in the 1970s and 1980s noted that there is a tendency to accord different status to 'marginalised' Catholics. The definitions suggest that there is a clear dividing line between who is included and who is on the edge of the Catholic community; emphasising a Catholic identity made visible in Mass attendance, sacramental rites, and involvement in parish activities. Those involved in the development of the bishops' 'Crossing the Threshold' initiative sought to find a positive term to apply to Catholics who were not actively present at Mass or in the parish community. The core group became aware that no one term could encompass all the variety of Catholic identities and expressions of Catholicity. It was also important to the group that the language used to describe this

constituency of people did not communicate any sense of judgement.⁴ It must be recognised that this is a problematic area of language; there is an increasing varied population of baptised Catholics who do not meet the criteria of Sunday Mass attendance as defined by the Catholic Church, yet they have not, nor wish to ‘de-convert’, from the Catholic Faith.

The focus of this research is baptised Catholics who might be described as on the margins of parish life. It is important to start from the notion that ‘these are Christians who express their belonging to God and Christ in different and less easily numerically assessed ways from the present dominant model of regular Sunday worship and involvement in church groups and committees’ (Walker, 2011). This research, therefore, challenges narrow definitions of Catholicity and identity.

Previous Research

Research into church leaving (Dixon, et al., 2007; Francis & Richter, 2007; Richter & Francis, 1998) has highlighted a variety of reasons to explain why people leave church congregations. Research in the area of church attendance (Gill, 2003) suggests that the question of decline in church attendance is more nuanced than previously thought. Richter and Francis (1998) identified several different motivations for leaving a church congregation. These were: a change in culture and in attitudes to church attendance and authority in general; growing into a different stage of faith; the perceived cost of attending church outweighing the benefits; changes in home circumstances; unfulfilled expectations of worship, pastoral care and Church teachings; an unfulfilled sense of belonging; or a reaction to parents’ beliefs and practices. The lack of belief in the Christian faith was not rated highly as a reason for leaving church, although, for some, a loss of faith occurred through experience of a personal tragedy or a sense that faith had become meaningless. Richter and Francis (1998) argued that the process of leaving is a gradual measure and cumulative, and might be reversible for around about 45% of those who leave.

In Australian research into Catholics who had stopped attending Mass (Dixon, et al., 2007), the reasons for leaving were broken down into three main areas: family reasons; reasons connected to loss of faith; and those connected with church, such as irrelevance, issues and misuse of power, lack of growth in faith, and an unfulfilled need to belong. Like Richter and

⁴ Personal communication with Clare Ward, Home Mission Desk, Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis, Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales - Secretariat.

Francis (1998), Dixon et al (2007) argue that the changes were gradual. Changes in church attendance could be linked to wider changes in Australian society such as work practices, Sunday sport and shopping, but they also noted even minor changes in parish organisation, such as a change in Mass times, could result in a considerable number of people becoming disconnected. The researchers highlighted the fact that many church leavers continued maintaining a Catholic identity, although they may have limited knowledge of Church teachings. Dixon et al (2007) suggested that their research could be taken further by investigating: parishes that were more successful at attracting and retaining Mass attenders; ideas of Catholic identity, commitment, and community as understood by non-attending Catholics; and parents of children attending Catholic schools.

There are few studies into why these Catholics retain a Catholic identity, while no longer attending church (Hornbeck, 2011). However, empirical research (Andersen, 2010; Casson, 2011, 2012; Dixon et al., 2007; Fulton, 2000; Hoge, 2001; Inglis, 2007; Rymarz & Graham, 2006) has shown that many Catholics, in particular young Catholics, have a diverse and fragmented understanding of their Catholic identity. A study of Catholics who are no longer involved with the Church is a difficult task as they are a statistically invisible population and so are hard to measure as a number and otherwise. However, there are many non-churchgoing Catholics who are still involved with some aspect of Catholicism through education (Grace, 2003), social action or one off events, such as World Youth Day (Rymarz, 2007). Such Catholics may maintain a Catholic identity, but the traditional markers of Catholic identity fixed in time and space, namely Sunday Mass and attendance in a parish church, no longer have any meaning in their lives (Hervieu-Léger, 2003).

Research Focus and Methodology

The focus in this report is baptised Catholic parents who have chosen to send their child to a Catholic primary school in England and Wales. The two main reasons for this focus were, firstly, that the aim of the Department of Evangelisation and Catechesis (Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales) is to identify opportunities for outreach and effective ways to encourage non-churchgoing Catholics to re-connect with their faith; such an approach would be more fruitful among people who retain some connection with the Catholic Faith, however tenuous. Secondly, there is much anecdotal evidence, supported by research in Australia (Freund, 2001; McLaughlin, 2005), that the majority of parents at the majority of Catholic primary schools do not regularly attend Mass. In 2011 there were 1,673 Catholic

primary schools in England educating 409,410 pupils (Department of Education, 2011), which would provide a wide and accessible database from which to draw a sample for the purposes of this research. The study involved a selection of Catholic parents from five Catholic primary schools from the five Catholic ecclesial provinces of England and Wales.⁵

To mitigate as much as possible any harmful effects on participants, it is important to work with the researched, to view them as participants rather than subjects, and to focus on the individual's contribution to the research (Oliver, 2003, p. 6). Informed consent was sought and given by each participant. Every participant was given a guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity; this was an important factor in the participants' open and honest sharing of opinions and stories. For this reason, no details are provided which could identify either the Catholic schools or participants; throughout this report, no quotations from participants are referenced. The Catholic primary schools and participants have been anonymised and any details that may lead to identification have been removed.

The research method employed is the qualitative case study, emphasising narrative rather than statistics. The qualitative case study method is an important complement to quantitative studies; it allows for an openness and flexibility. The majority of research studies in this area have been quantitative providing statistical evidence of the decline in church attendance. The aim of this study is to uncover the stories behind those statistics; it is 'to understand human behaviour at ever increasing depth and to communicate this deepening understanding to others' (Nesbitt, 2004, p. 5). Qualitative research methods are about the process rather than the outcomes, and more often about discovery rather than confirmation. This case study provides a snapshot of the beliefs and attitudes of a small sample of Catholic parents. The findings generated by this method should raise questions in the minds of researchers and practitioners, which could be confirmed or challenged by further quantitative research. In this research study, the focus is on the participants' understanding or perceptions of events (Merriam, 1988). The Catholic Faith is viewed through the lens of these Catholic parents. The researcher recognises that participants' perceptions of the Catholic Faith may not be coherent; however, such perceptions provide a valuable insight into 'the intersection of individual and institutional realities' (Ammerman, 2007, p.13).

⁵ An additional sixth Catholic primary school was later added to maintain balance in terms of rural and urban schools. A brief outline of Catholic primary schools chosen and the selection criteria can be found in Appendix A.

The main method employed to collect data was semi-structured interviews⁶. A positive outcome of the face-to-face interviews was that the parents determined to some extent the direction of the interview⁷. They were free to define their own idea of Catholicity and contributed narrative accounts of their faith journey. The interviews were complemented by a short qualitative survey distributed both electronically and in paper form. The aim of this questionnaire was to confirm or challenge the interview findings. Overall, the questionnaire supported the data collected from interviews; one difference was noted in response to questions on Mass attendance. In interviews, three quarters of Catholic parents claimed to attend Mass, once or twice a month; yet, in the questionnaire over half of parents claimed to attend Mass once a week. The reasons for this difference could be that regular Mass attenders were more likely to complete a questionnaire, or some people have responded with what they wish they did, or what they think—an ideal response should be. Perrier (2009) noted in research commissioned for Cafod that ‘in surveys people generally over-claim when asked about a “virtuous” behaviour’. The majority of quotations cited in the report are taken from the interview transcripts; quotations from the questionnaires are highlighted by a [Q].

An important decision taken early on in the writing up of this report was to allow the voices of the participants to be heard in the context of their life. A large number of quotations have been included from the transcripts of the interviews to reflect as many different voices as possible. For the most part, quotations are presented as expressed by the Catholic parents, with only a minimum of editing to ensure clarity of expression. However, the structure for reporting the participants’ perceptions is necessarily that of the researcher, influenced by my values and perceptions. In the light of this, the research has been read by three different advisors in an attempt to counter-act that potential bias.

39 parents participated in an in-depth face-to-face interview; a further 107 completed a short qualitative questionnaire. The participants were aged between 24 and 54 years, with the majority being between 35-44 years old; 85% were female and 15% male⁸. All were volunteers, so responses are representative only of parents within the Catholic primary school who wished to contribute to the research. The parents were selected by invitation. An

⁶ See Appendix C for a sample of the interview questions.

⁷ In such interviews, the researcher retains a list of questions, but allows the conversation to flow and questions to be answered out of sequence; the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is more equal, neither having complete control over the conversation. This method allows participants to share in depth stories and opinions that illuminate aspects of their life, which are not so easily captured in quantitative research.

⁸ See Appendix B for further background information about the participants.

invitation to participate in the research study was sent to parents through the usual mailing system, newsletter, emails, or individual letters by each of the participating Catholic primary schools. A member of staff in each school collated responses and organised an interview timetable convenient to both researcher and parents. Less formal interviews were also conducted with priests, headteachers, and pastoral workers connected to the Catholic primary schools.

The findings are set out in five sections: Catholic Faith; Catholic Primary School; Sunday Mass; Catholic Parish Community and Religious Literacy. Each section could form a full report in itself; there is a potential for much more analysis of the data in every area. Each section could be read separately, but it must be recognised that to understand fully the spiritual needs of Catholic parents, in the home, in the parish, or in the Catholic primary school, all areas are inextricably entwined. The final chapter reflects on the findings and considers the possible implications for New Evangelisation. The following report provides much to reflect upon and hopefully will inform and inspire those working in the field of evangelisation in England and Wales. The report concludes with a reflection on the implications and challenges for New Evangelisation in England and Wales. Readers of this research are invited to listen to the views of the Catholic parents and reflect on the implications relevant to their mission context.

2. Catholic Faith

Catholics express their Catholic Faith and identity in a variety of ways. The Catholic parents who contributed to this research project expressed their understanding of the Catholic Faith in everyday language, not the language of the theology; their understandings are not always coherent nor always correspond to Catholic Church's teachings. However, it is essential to listen to their voices as they explain what being Catholic means for them, because the Catholic Faith is, primarily, about being in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and His Church. This Christ-centred encounter and relationship is central to the work of New Evangelisation. Listening to baptised Catholics' faith perspectives is important in the study of 'ordinary theology' (Astley, 2002); it may often provide fruitful insights for both academic theology and for pastoral work in the Catholic Church. The majority of the parents (85%) surveyed self-identified as Catholic⁹ and the report focuses on the opinions and perceptions of baptised Catholic parents. This chapter explores parents' references to belief in God, prayer, the Sacrament of Baptism, the upholding of Catholic values and challenging aspects of Catholic ethical teachings.

2.1 Elements of a Catholic Faith

Many Catholic parents found it difficult to express their understanding of the Catholic Faith in an articulate manner. Indeed many said it was not something they had ever thought about, or that anybody had ever asked them: 'I think, it is really difficult because if you have never been anything other than Catholic, it is really difficult to work it out'. The inability of many Catholic parents to express coherently their ideas about the Catholic Faith was the major challenge of face-to-face interviews. The inarticulateness of parents reflects previous Catholic research findings; Hornsby-Smith (1991) in the 1970s and 1980s found a difficulty in interpreting results of interviews as 'the assumption that an individual's belief constituted a coherent system was shown to be highly problematic' (1991, p.25); as has been noted above, the questions asked had frequently never been considered.

Many Catholic parents expressed the view that their faith was an important aspect of their lives: 'my faith is part of who I am: it defines my personality and sets me apart from other

⁹ See Appendix B for information about the participants.

people’; ‘it is part of my life. With God my life is better’.¹⁰ Some Catholic parents hoped for a stronger faith to cope with life:

Daily life can be very difficult and I have had times when I have felt beaten, [faith is] a constant resource of strength that could keep those times at bay and enable me to be a better mother, wife, daughter, sister in order to support others.

You know that faith thing that I am trying to keep in my heart. [It is] sometimes hard when everything outside goes wrong, I want to know how to keep that faith stronger. Sometimes when you are struggling, you don’t see ways out of it and you don’t know what to do.

The Catholic parents who participated in the research were sharing their Catholic Faith with both their friends, their children and other relatives. One Catholic mother had given her grandmother a Bible and shared her faith with her:

My Nan was [Church of England], but she never believed in God. She said to me once “where did all this come from?” I said to her you got to really believe, Nan, because you have to have something to believe in.

The Sacraments, particularly Baptism

A clear connection to the Catholic Faith was evident in the Catholic parents’ acceptance and valuing of the sacraments, which were perceived as an essential part of Catholicism:

The sacraments are the most important thing for me [as a Catholic] because I think they are such a big part of being Catholic. [The sacraments] make you stand out.

Both my parents were Catholic, so [there was] not really any choice, baptised, went to a Catholic school, [I am] following the sacraments through life.

All the Catholic parents who took part in the research had been baptised as Catholics. It was generally accepted that reception of the Sacrament of Baptism conferred membership of the Catholic Church; it was the demarcation line between those who were in and those outside.

¹⁰ See Appendix D for a selection of the Catholic parents’ responses.

However, in one area some Catholic parents stated that they had waited before seeking Baptism for their children because the celebration was expensive:

If you want your child baptised, [the parish] has an open invitation from time to time. It is less formal. We had put it [Baptism] off because it was too expensive, so we came along [it was] really nice and saved us the financial worry.

One interesting point raised independently by two non-Catholic parents was that they had considered being baptised as Catholics, but had never found the right time to approach the priest. There is a need for awareness of the role of non-Catholic parents within the Catholic primary school community; a non-Catholic mother (married to a baptised Catholic) stated that most people presumed she was Catholic and had never asked her about her faith. The Baptism of their child is often the first reconnection with the Catholic Faith that parents have made since attending church themselves as a child. Several parents had taken a 'baptism course' before their child's baptism. It is a key moment of reconnection with young Catholic adults; one Catholic parent explained that she had started to attend Mass regularly since she had had her children baptised.

A Belief in God

Expressing what having a Catholic Faith involved posed a challenge for many Catholic parents. For several parents a belief in God was the most important aspect of their Catholic Faith: 'it is just basically your faith in believing that there is a God'. God was described as a God of love:

God loves me and he has forgiven [me] for my sins.

He doesn't really see a right or a wrong. No matter what you do wrong, God loves you.

Several Catholic parents employed the image of God as a protector: 'I say to [my children] you have to pray to God to protect us.' Others spoke of God as a guide: 'I believe in God; he guides me through each day [so] I can be the best I can be'.

Two Catholic parents explained their faith with regard to a belief in life after death, for one this was a comfort, for another this belief was not a reassurance but tinged with fear of judgement:

I believe that there is a God and there is life after death that is a strong thing to believe... my whole family we do [believe].

I am quite scared knowing that I am going to die. I need to know I am not a bad person. The only person that can judge me is God and I do believe even though I am scared. I won't be judged. I know I am not on my own and He is there to help me, that makes sense.

Believing in God was for some parents, a faith in the unknown:

A bit of you doesn't want to grow up, having God there especially because I have never seen Him. I have never spoken to Him touched Him, I talk to Him, but he has never actually stood in front of me and spoken to me.

I have friends [who] are not Catholic, they don't even believe and they [ask] me how I know. I say how do you know you are breathing air, you have not seen it, but you believe it because you have learnt it...and that is the same for me. I have never seen, but I [believe]. Some people just don't want to have that belief.

Many parents spoke about their faith in terms of personal prayer; belief in God and the power of prayer provided a 'good feeling' a 'comfort':

I think prayer has a lot to do with your faith...because if you pray [you] get help.

It is because I believe, [when] you have prayed and prayed and you have asked Him to help you. You get that answer, it is a nice feeling, it is a nice kind of sense of feeling so that is what I always tell my daughter, you got to believe.

Teaching their children to pray was important for many Catholic parents:

We do prayers with the children...this year [has been] really tough...I say my prayers at night with the children ...my son will say to me I will pray for you today mummy.

It means I do pray a lot through my life, being a Catholic I feel like I am never alone, there is always someone you can turn to, and I would like my children to follow my footsteps.

Only two Catholic parents mentioned formal prayer, in the form of the rosary; for most of them prayer was described in terms of informal prayer. The importance of prayer in daily life requires further investigation; it provides a useful insight into the spiritual needs of Christians (Ap Siôn, 2013).

2.2 Catholic Values

Many Catholic parents expressed their Catholic identity not in terms of belief, but as upholding and passing on Catholic values. These were spoken of in terms of caring for others:

A Catholic is someone who should be there for one another, be good to your neighbour, because that is what it is all about.

It is a way you try to remember to be nice to people, it goes into all your life and it is the way I want my kids to grow up.

One Catholic parent expressed an assumption that:

The generations have changed, the faith has changed as time's gone on I think it is just about respect, love, and care. I find that the majority of Catholics are caring, and loving and respectful.

Caring for others is not a value unique to the Catholic Faith, although it was identified by many participants as a Catholic value. For many Catholic parents, mention of Jesus was often framed in terms of moral behaviour:

[Being Catholic] means following Jesus' basic teachings about not putting yourself first, the vulnerable are most important.

To believe in God and believe in Jesus you have to try and be selfless in life, have everyone else's considerations in your head and just have faith that God will look after you.

Christie (2013) in her research amongst Anglican congregations noted that many of the participants spoke of Jesus as a 'moral exemplar', but had 'no clear idea about the main thrust of Jesus' teaching', they 'retained snippets of the story; remembered fragments to which they struggled to give meaning' (p.80). The identification of faith with moral behaviour has been

described by Nancy Ammerman as ‘Golden Rule’ Christianity: it is a view of religion as ‘right living’ rather than ‘right believing’ (Ammerman, 1997). To conclude this section, it can be seen that the Catholic faith is important for some parents as a form of moral guidance, Christian values determined the way they live their lives. However, it must be noted that the relationship between Christian values and Christian beliefs and practices are not always clear.

2.3 A Questioning Faith

Several Catholic parents were aware that their ‘Catholic Faith’ might not correspond to the teachings of the Catholic Church, and for one parent this meant that she would not describe herself as a devout Catholic:

I believe in God and that he looks after us. He doesn’t really see a right or a wrong. You are taking just different avenues. I don’t read the Bible every week. I am not...I just know what I believe.

For other Catholic parents, there was a sense of a right to define what it meant to be Catholic:

[Being Catholic is] following Jesus, believing in God and sharing His love, saying prayers, caring for other people and giving money to charity. This is what it means to me personally, maybe not what I feel it is supposed to mean. [Q]

I feel my faith is important in being a good person, thinking of others, doing whatever I can to help others, and leading a good and moral life, not necessarily the "being a Catholic" bit. [Q]

One parent maintained her faith was important: ‘[but] recently I have lost faith and confidence in the Church as an organisation’. [Q]. A few participants raised concerns about the Catholic Church’s response to the clerical abuse scandal:

I think [Francis] is going on the right track...by correcting the bad things that have happened in the past by the Catholic Church. [Q]

[The pope should] make the priests that were involved in wrongdoing face their responsibilities. [Q]

The view was that their Catholic Faith was not a diluted Catholic Faith, but rather a different form of it; a common attitude was the claim that they had a right to choose the elements required and to discard those outdated or not relevant. The assertion of a right to question the teachings of the Catholic Church was most apparent with reference to the ethical teaching of

the Catholic Church. One Catholic mother expressed how she found it a challenge to apply Catholic teaching in her life:

I mean the contraceptive thing, having many kids won't work for everyone, and it feels you are not obeying your faith if you do something against it. Maybe I think that is one of the hard things for everyone because I don't see myself as having loads and loads of kids, how [would I] live financially that is just one example. I feel certain [that this is] the biggest thing that would keep me away from the Catholic Church. I think if you are taking precautions you are doing something against it, but it is not really against the Catholic Church we are doing it for our own life.

Some Catholic parents expressed a view that they were 'uncomfortable' with Catholic teaching on marriage:

If you are divorced, if you are not married [to your partner], there many rules that people feel uncomfortable with. I was not married in a Catholic Church, I have kept my own name, and people wonder if I am married.

The question of 'gay marriage' was in the media at the time of the research, and two Catholic parents expressed their disagreement with the Catholic Church's teaching.

I don't agree with the Church's position on gay marriage, and for me the hardest thing I have found about Mass is the whole gay marriage preaching and I was actually going to walk out with my children. I felt I had to speak to [my son] about being gay and I would rather not have had that conversation.

[The Catholic Church] has been vocal in the press about homosexuality and stuff; people think that is what we are about. It should be more about tolerance; our image in the media is intolerance. The gay marriage thing, [the priest] is really against it, but surely, it is for us to make up our own mind about it, and you do have to be tolerant of everyone.

The impression from this first set of findings suggests that Catholics retain elements of the Catholic Faith, yet assert the right to challenge some aspects of the Catholic Church teachings¹¹. There is an assumption common to many Catholics: 'for many young adults,

¹¹ See further discussion in Chapter 7.

Catholicism is not so much a binding community of discipleship as a cultural tool kit of symbolic religious/spiritual wares from which it is possible to construct a personal religious identity' (Hoge, 2001, p.226). Moreover, living in a pluralistic society, Catholics are aware of many competing views on ethical issues and assert the right to adopt a view that most closely corresponds to their beliefs and lifestyle. That stated, only a few of the participating parents specifically spoke about their concerns relating to the Church's teaching about contraception and marriage.

The generation to which the majority of these Catholic parents belong, has no faith-based experience of a strongly bonded Catholic community before the Second Vatican Council; rather, this generation experiences a pluralistic, individualistic, and anti-authoritarian culture (Ryan, 2008, p.30). The implications of these findings for New Evangelisation are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

The next section considers an aspect of Catholicism that was highly valued by all contributors to this research: the Catholic primary school community.

Chapter 2: Catholic Faith: Questions for Ongoing Reflection / Discussion

1. What most struck you in what you have just read?
2. What do you think is meant by the term ‘Catholic values’?
3. How could Catholic beliefs and values be expressed more visibly in the life of your parish and/or Catholic school?
4. What opportunities for New Evangelisation can you identify in the research findings so far?
5. What might a possible pastoral response(s) be to one of the following:
 - Catholics express their Catholic Faith and identity in a variety of ways. Many Catholic parents found it difficult to articulate their understanding of the Catholic Faith.
 - Many Catholic parents expressed the view that their faith was an important aspect of their lives. The Catholic parents who participated in the research were sharing their Catholic Faith with friends.
 - A clear connection to the Catholic Faith was evident in the Catholic parents’ acceptance and valuing of the sacraments. The ‘baptism course’ before their child’s baptism is a key moment of reconnection with young Catholic adults.
 - Most prayer was described in terms of informal prayer.
 - Catholic values were expressed in terms of caring for others.
 - It was found that Jesus was most likely to be referred to in terms of moral behaviour. Several Catholic parents were aware that their ‘Catholic Faith’ might not correspond to the teaching of the Catholic Church.
 - The view was that their Catholic Faith was not a diluted Catholic Faith, but a different form. A commonly held attitude was the right to choose the essential elements of the faith and to discard what they viewed as outdated or irrelevant elements. Catholics retain elements of the Catholic Faith, yet assert the right to challenge the Catholic Church teachings.

3. Catholic Primary School

The connection between all of the Catholic parents who contributed to this research, was that they had made a choice to send their child to a Catholic primary school. The Catholic primary school and all Catholic schools have always been at the forefront of the Catholic Church's mission (Arthur, 1995; McLaughlin, 1996). This section addresses Catholic parents' perceptions of the Catholic primary school in the twenty first century. It begins first with an exploration of the reasons given by Catholic parents for choosing the Catholic school and secondly, a consideration of Catholic parents' experiences of the Catholicity of the Catholic primary school.

3.1 Choosing a Catholic school

The main reasons given for choosing a Catholic primary school were: academic reputation; good values; location; the teaching of the Catholic Faith; and the Catholic ethos. Considering first, the secular reasons put forward by Catholic parents; many participants regarded the academic reputation of the school to be of paramount importance: 'The reason is because [this school] is the best in the borough [for] my son, the best school, the best education'. One Catholic parent expressed the view that the academic standing of the Catholic primary school would override a desire for Catholic education:

You go to school to learn to read and write...not just because it is Catholic because you can do the Catholic side of things out of school...most important is the education. [It is] added bonus [it is] a faith school. I wanted a Catholic school, but it had to have good results.

Many parents expected the Catholic primary school to instil 'good' moral values into their children. One mother explained that she had chosen this Catholic primary school because 'I want [my daughters] to be good girls'. Other parents cited the reputation of the Catholic primary school for the 'good behaviour' of the pupils:

[The children] always have good reputations for politeness. My neighbours children always went here and they were nothing but polite and I have heard nothing but praise for this school.

The perception of good behaviour was often linked to a view that the Catholic primary school had 'nicer' morals, 'better' discipline, and 'better' values than in an 'ordinary' school.

Catholic parents assumed that a Catholic primary school would provide excellent pastoral care: 'It is not just education but the caring, the looking after the whole child'.

[It is a] kind and caring, very safe environment. From the experience I have had and my friends [that is] not found in the state system. [My child's] special needs would not be met [elsewhere] as much as they are here. I think he is quite safe here.

Location was an important factor that some parents prioritised over the desire for Catholic education: 'it's what you sign up for as a Catholic you get your child baptised and where possible a Catholic school...[but] if it wasn't reasonably close I would have to rethink.' Another parent explained how she had had doubts about choosing the Catholic primary school:

I live in quite a remote rural area and I didn't want my son to be alienated from the other children for going to a different school.

On the one hand, Catholic parents in two areas stated that they would not be sending their children onto the local Catholic secondary school because a community school was closer by which had a good academic reputation. On the other hand, one rural Catholic parent transported her daughter twelve miles to ensure she obtained a Catholic education.

The Catholic parents' concerns about academic reputation, pastoral care, good values, and location are no different to the concerns of the majority of parents when choosing a primary school for their child. Catholic schools in England and Wales have had a reputation for providing a good academic education (Morris, 2010, Grace, 2003). Research has highlighted that the success of Catholic schools is due in part to the close home, school partnership, and an enhanced sense of collegiality in Catholic schools (Bryk, 1993). Previous research has shown that religious considerations are often parents' lowest priority when choosing a Catholic school (Rymarz, 2012, p.113). The reasons why baptised Catholic parents choose a Catholic primary school when they do not actively participate in the Catholic Church are complex. However, many Catholic parents in this research sample maintained that the prime reason for the choice of a Catholic school was the Catholic nature of the primary school.

3.2 Catholicity of the Catholic school

75% of Catholic parents who contributed to the questionnaire maintained that their reason for choosing the primary school was that it taught the Catholic Faith. Reflections on what made a primary school a Catholic school focused mainly on the parents' experience in this particular Catholic primary school, as they had limited experience of other Catholic primary schools or indeed of other primary schools.

A Catholic Heritage

Many Catholic parents expressed a desire for their child to experience Catholicism in a Catholic community because, it was part of their religious identity, and/or they desired their child to be 'taught' the Catholic Faith. Some Catholic parents wanted their children to experience a Catholic upbringing similar to their own:

I myself went to Catholic primary school had a wonderful memory a wonderful time there and I suppose it is important to me that I encourage a faith for the children that would be as a Catholic.

I went to this school myself, and I am nearly thirty. All my brothers have been here and now obviously my two children are here. I know people, I know the teachers they come and speak to me, and they inform me.

The Catholic school was viewed as being part of the Catholic community: 'because me and my husband are both Catholic and we wanted our children to grow up in the Catholic community'.

Teaching the Catholic Faith

The Catholic primary schools were seen to have a relaxed and 'fun' approach to the teaching of the Catholic Faith, as it was not 'forced upon' the children:

It is very accepting and [they] explain things to the children; it is a good learning school not just in education but learning in the faith.

The teaching of the Catholic Faith was seen by some Catholic parents to reinforce teaching from home; for other Catholic parents, however, it was the role of the Catholic school to teach their children the Catholic Faith: 'you need to know what you need to do to be a good

Catholic. I do believe that this school does do that'. Parents appreciated that the Catholic school was able to provide comfort and religious guidance:

I want my children to know that comfort, even if they never use it. It is a rock to cling to.

When we had deaths in the family, I am not best at words in things like that, but because he comes to a Catholic school, they did sort him out. [They explained] in just a nicer way of the whole life circle.

However, several Catholic parents qualified their desire for the Catholic primary school to teach the Catholic Faith to their child, explaining:

I want the teachings of the Church to be general rather than specific, just [let children] develop a relationship with God.

They do a lot of religious stuff, but not too much. I want her to make her own decisions.

The overall impression gained was a desire for a teaching of the Catholic Faith, but in 'general terms', and several Catholic parents stressed that although they had chosen a Catholic primary school, they wanted their child to make his/her own mind up about matters of faith.

The Catholic Ethos

In addition to the teaching of the Catholic Faith, it was also an experience of a Catholic ethos and community that motivated some parents to choose and support Catholic education: there was 'a great feeling about the school'; 'a strong ethos and mission statement that permeates the whole school'. Unpacking what is meant by 'the atmosphere' or the ethos is problematic as the parents themselves were unclear how to explain this 'atmosphere', but the perception was that it was a Catholic ethos. The Catholic ethos was created not only through a teaching of the Catholic Faith, but also through experiences of Catholic practices, encounters with 'Catholic people' and in the sense of a Catholic community in the Catholic primary school.

The Mass in School

The Catholic nature of the Catholic primary school was made visible, according to many Catholic parents, in the experiences of Mass in school. Invariably, when discussing the Catholic life of the Catholic primary school the parents would describe an experience of Mass. Parents shared in celebrations of small class Masses, whole school Masses in school, Mass in the local church in school time, or the occasional Sunday Masses in which the children were involved. The frequently attended Masses organised by the Catholic primary school are, for some Catholic parents, their only experience of a Catholic Mass. This was apparent when Catholic parents were asked to describe what they liked about attending Mass:

[It is] nice to see the whole school and you get to see the parents...especially in winter when they do the Christmas services.

[I like] how well behaved the children were in the school Mass at the church. The Christmas one ... puts sense of meaning [of] Christmas.

The main reason given for attendance at school Masses was to show support for their child. The celebration of Mass in the Catholic primary school could be seen as a means of ensuring attachment to the Catholic Faith tradition; Catholic diocesan inspectors, perceived school liturgies as 'a dialogic induction into Catholic religious practices' (Grace, 2002, p. 213). It must be recognised that for some Catholic parents it was only when invited by the Catholic primary school that they experienced Mass.

Catholic People

All the Catholic parents spoke highly of the Catholic staff and there was a common expectation that the staff were 'practising Catholics': 'practising staff is very important as a good role model for the children'. The assumption that all staff were Catholic was reinforced for the parents when they saw teachers attending Mass. Previous research has shown that increasing numbers of teachers in Catholic schools are not Catholic, and that Catholic teachers understanding of their Catholic identity is changing (Coll, 2007).

The majority of parents cited the presence of the parish priest in school or at the school gate as a visible sign of the Catholic nature of the school.

I do like is how the priest makes it fun for the children. How he talks to them, how he makes them laugh. I quite like the way he does it and the children like him. He comes into school quite a lot. What I do like is he goes and eats his lunch in there with the children.

Parents maintained that the parish priest ‘knew’ everyone’s name, this ‘knowing of names’ was emphasised by many parents. Some of the Catholic primary schools had a parent liaison officer or a pastoral worker, and for Catholic parents, these people formed a link between the Catholic school and the Catholic parish. This role was much appreciated by parents:

I like the way [the pastoral worker] is heavily involved in school....she is like an ambassador for the church she is great been really good to us. That actually goes back that it is what makes the school so good is her role.... without that, you would feel isolated and out of touch, [she and the priest] keep it together.

It was through the priest or the pastoral worker that connections were made to the wider Catholic community, to the Catholic parish. The parents’ sense of belonging to the Catholic school often did not extend to a sense of belonging to the Catholic parish except through connections developed by the parish priest or pastoral workers.¹²

3.3 A Catholic community

A concept that was emphasised by all the Catholic parents interviewed was that the Catholic primary school was a Catholic community to which they had a strong sense of belonging. The Catholic primary school was a friendly place, with a ‘community atmosphere’, where parents experienced ‘a feeling of warmth, inclusion, and community.’

I think there is a real sense of community in this school; obviously, I have no experience of other schools. I feel involved. I feel part of it. [The head teacher] involves the community a lot, gives us the opportunity to help in school.

The Catholic school community was often compared to a family: ‘It is like a big family this school...we are one big family...we support each other’. Many Catholic parents were actively involved in the Catholic primary school. All the Catholic parents who contributed described clear and active lines of communication. Not only did all the Catholic parents state that they were well informed about the Catholic primary school, but they felt that the staff

¹² See further Chapter 5.

and priests ‘knew’ them and their children. One Catholic primary school ran regular courses including parenting skills, and arts and crafts; this was appreciated by many Catholic parents. Invitations to participate in the Catholic primary school community were mentioned often in all the primary schools that took part in this research, whether it was volunteering, attending assemblies, and liturgies or through being invited to participate in a course to develop skills. The parents expressed the view that the Catholic primary school valued them, their support, and their skills; this enhanced a sense of belonging to the Catholic community. Those Catholic parents, who were not so involved in the school community, explained this was only because of lack of time due to work commitments, or living at some distance from the school.

The Catholic primary school was a Catholic community that engendered a sense of belonging to the Catholic Faith (this issue will be considered in more detail in Chapter 7). This is the only place that some of the Catholic parents surveyed experienced a sense of Catholic community. Their weak sense of belonging to a parish community raises important questions with regard to the New Evangelisation.¹³ The next section explores Catholic parent’s attitudes to Sunday Mass attendance in their local parish church.

¹³ See further Chapter 5

Chapter 3: Primary School: Questions for Ongoing Reflection / Discussion

1. What most struck you in this chapter?
2. How do you interpret the term ‘Catholic ethos’?
3. In what ways could a Catholic primary school and a local parish work together to create a stronger sense of belonging to a Catholic community?
4. What opportunities for New Evangelisation can you identify in the research findings in this section?
5. What might a possible pastoral response(s) be to one of the following:
 - Catholic parents assumed that a Catholic primary school would provide excellent pastoral care.
 - Many Catholic parents expressed a desire for their child to experience Catholicism.
 - For some Catholic parents it was the role of the Catholic school to teach their children the Catholic Faith. The overall impression gained was a desire for a teaching of the Catholic Faith, but in ‘general terms’.
 - Parents frequently attended Masses organised by the Catholic primary school, but for some, this is their only experience of a Catholic Mass.
 - There was a common expectation that the staff were ‘practising Catholics’: ‘practising staff is very important as a good role model for the children’.
 - The majority of parents cited the presence of the parish priest in school or at the school gate as a visible sign of the Catholic nature of the school.
 - A parent liaison officer or a pastoral worker formed a link between the Catholic school and the Catholic parish.
 - Catholic parents had a weak sense of belonging to a parish community.

4. Sunday Mass in the Parish Church

Attendance at Sunday Mass is an integral part of Catholic identity; reception of the Eucharist is the ‘source and summit’ of Christian life (Catholic Catechism, n.1324). The majority of Catholic parents who contributed to this research were occasional Mass-goers (attending once or twice a month or less). It is important to recognise that none of the Catholic parents shared that they no longer attended Mass at all; the parents did not perceive themselves as ‘church leavers’. This section of the research will explore the reasons that Catholic parents gave for their presence at, or absence from, Sunday Mass. After a consideration of the factors that encouraged Catholic parents to attend Mass, some of the barriers to attendance at Mass are examined. The final part of this section reflects on the place of Sunday Mass in Catholic parents’ understanding of their Catholic identity.

4.1 Motivation for Going to Mass

All Catholic parents who contributed to this research had attended Mass in the last year. Their reasons for attending were influenced by a desire to provide for their children’s spiritual needs, and for their own spiritual well-being. In only one of the Catholic primary schools surveyed were the criteria of the school’s admission policy cited as a reason why some parents might regularly attend Mass. In this over-subscribed Catholic primary school, parents were aware that the first category on the admissions policy was reserved for practising Catholics. A few parents expressed a view that ‘other’ parents might be attending Mass to ensure their child’s place in that school:

Lots of parents don’t go to church. They want them baptised and they want them to be brought up in the faith. They don’t usually go [to church] it is only when they want the forms signed for school.

I think the one thing that some of my friends [do] and I know it is bad, but they want their children to go to Catholic schools. I know a lot of people who wouldn’t usually go [to church], [but because] just looking at the statistics, the Catholic schools get better results. I feel that a few of my friends, they always put their children first. [They] want the best for their future.

The question of Mass attendance and admission criteria was not a concern in any other of the research areas.

A few Catholic parents spoke of attending Mass in response to an invitation from the Catholic school, or from the organisers of the sacramental preparation program. It is significant to observe the positive response from parents to a personal invitation to Mass. For some Catholic parents their only experience of Mass was when organised by the Catholic primary school. One Catholic parent explained that what she liked about Mass was seeing the whole school together including the parents¹⁴.

The sacramental preparation time of First Holy Communion was a key moment when Catholic parents said they would attend Mass more frequently:

We have been encouraged to come every Sunday for First Communion preparation.

I think the main thing was my son's communion. We had to show him what it is and how it needs to find out everything about being Catholic, so we started to take him to Mass.

One Catholic parent expressed a view that for some parents the only time that they would attend Mass would be around First Holy Communion preparation time. The Catholic parents interviewed spoke positively of their experiences of attending Mass as part of the sacramental preparation. A pastoral worker and one parish priest explained how Catholic parents would make a great effort to attend Mass during the time of the sacramental preparation programme, but attendance was often not maintained beyond that period. The reason why this attendance did not continue beyond the First Holy Communion celebration is complex; a pastoral worker argued that some parents were solely attending for the sake of their child, not for their own spiritual needs. She maintained that many of the mothers she worked with would always put their children's needs foremost, and with little or no support from a partner, they could not justify attending Mass for their own personal benefit¹⁵.

The provision of excellent children's liturgy was cited by some Catholic parents as the reason to attend Mass with their children: 'I take the children every weekend, the children's liturgy is offered for the children, which is great; it explains the Gospel in their own words'. Children's liturgy was often the only area of parish life in which Catholic parents were

¹⁴ See Chapter 3 for discussion of Mass in school.

¹⁵ See Chapter 6 for further discussion of sacramental preparation programmes.

actively involved¹⁶. The provision of children's liturgy enabled some parents to experience Mass without the 'distraction' of their children. However, the description of the provision and resourcing of children's liturgy differed greatly in the various areas. Some Catholic parents were critical of an old-fashioned style of children's liturgy, while others argued that children should be in Mass:

Mass for me is time with the children [when they] should be trained to comply with the Mass...not going into children's liturgy.

When Catholic parents described experiences of Mass, they focused on the value for the child's spiritual needs, for example, in the description of homilies:

I think the sermons are good, the way they teach the children. They can understand it. Fr X is very good. He gets the children involved.

I like the priest he is very friendly and his sermons are interesting. He involves everyone including the children

The parents appreciated the priests' homilies, in particular, when they were humorous or relevant to their everyday life: 'I like the sermons. Father Y makes it practical to everyday and he puts humour into it'.

Personal Worship / Quiet Time

Catholic parents rarely spoke of how their own spiritual needs were met in Mass because so much of their involvement with the Catholic Faith was viewed through the lens of their child's faith needs. However, when asked to focus on their experiences of Mass, many Catholic parents stressed how it was an oasis of peace in a busy life:

[I go to Mass] for peace of mind, [you] feel like someone is there to support us, you tell [your] sorrows to God.

I have been recently [to Mass]. To be honest I feel it is a time where I can connect if I have done anything wrong and I just feel at peace there.

The quiet, I like the peace, just that time I don't get a lot of peace.

¹⁶ See Chapter 5 for further discussion.

Several parents spoke of the feelings engendered by going to Mass:

It is like that feeling inside. It is like belonging and happiness and how much trouble you have, you can breathe a sigh of relief.

You might have worries...when I go to church the difference from when I have gone in and come out I feel very refreshed and relieved...you just have a sense of good feeling and warmth.

Catholic parents also appreciated the opportunity to sing: 'I love the singing. I love the opportunity to stop, think, and pray, because I don't have much time at other times of the week'. One Catholic mother whose partner had started to attend Mass at the time of the child's sacramental preparation, claimed that one of the reasons he continued to attend was because, 'he loves the hymns and the way we sing the Lord's prayer...[It is a] family atmosphere with the singing'. Several parents mentioned that they enjoyed it particularly when the hymns were known to the children.

The Catholic parents' motivation to attend Mass often focused on the needs of their children. There were few dislikes of Mass expressed, those that were mentioned; concerned the particular, such as the replacement of hymnbooks with hymn sheets, or a priest whose sermons were not clear. These positive descriptions of experiences of Mass raise questions as to why Catholic parents do not attend more frequently. The next section explores some of the reasons given by the Catholic parents as to why they did not attend Mass.

4.2 Challenges: Competing Commitments

Several Catholic parents shared the challenges that they encountered in attending Sunday Mass. These included: competing commitments whether paid employment or children's leisure activities, a lack of knowledge about Mass, previous negative experiences of Mass with young children, and a perception that regular Mass attendance was not part of Catholic identity for their generation.

For many Catholic parents the weekend was determined by their children's leisure commitments. Football leagues, and dance classes were often structured so that absence for one week would result in the loss of a place 'on the team':

We don't go [to Mass] regularly. [We have] lots of commitments with football with the children, which makes it very difficult.

We would go every two or three weeks and in terms of Mass, there is a practical issue here. This might sound a bit basic, football club is on Sunday morning, and we would try to go to one or the other. Obviously, it is hard.

I would go to Mass more often if time suited for the children. [It is] just the children have a lot of other things - swimming and dancing - and a lot of things.

We are busy right through the week and the weekend.

One Catholic mother explained how she aimed to attend Mass every week, by planning Mass attendance around football matches; to do this she knew the Mass times in the five surrounding parishes and described herself as a 'peripatetic mass attender'. For the majority of Catholic parents the conflict between a child's leisure commitment and Mass was a challenge, and the leisure commitment most frequently took priority. One head teacher explained that parents could see the benefit of their son retaining his place on the football team, but they could not quantify the benefit of attending Mass.

Paid Employment Commitments

The other major conflicting commitment for some Catholic parents was paid employment at the weekends:

I don't get to go to Mass as I have to work every Saturday, and Sunday. I work nights, so don't get to go to Mass as often as I would like. You know you come out [of Mass] feeling...I can't explain. I have not got the words for it. Just nice. I feel better when I have been to Mass, that's why it is a pity there is not a midweek one.

A desire for a mid-week Mass was mentioned in two other areas. Parents were unaware that there was provision of mid-week Masses in the parishes; one Catholic parent who was aware, explained that she wasn't sure whether she could go to midweek Masses or whether these Masses were just for the 'regulars'. It was frequently stated that the timing of Sunday Masses was not family-friendly, with the conflict between children's leisure activities on Sunday mornings. Evening Masses were seen as inconvenient for parents with young children; some parents suggested a more convenient time for Mass was late afternoon. Some Catholic

parents assumed that Mass times were set to suit an older generation who formed the main part of the parish congregation.

The participants' prime concern was the care of their family:

...Looking after my family and giving my children the best start in life, whether that be spending time with them, doing homework, taking them places.[Q]

All the Catholic parents believed that the aspect of their life that concerned them most was a lack of time:

[I would wish for] more time, not more money just more time. [Q]

I would like to spend more time with my children and my husband because we both have long hour jobs. [Q]¹⁷.

One Catholic parent questioned whether the Catholic Church understood the practicalities of family life. As leisure and employment opportunities have increased on Sundays, it is inevitable, that the competition for parents' time increases. Time is limited, and each individual has to make decisions on how to use that time, but for many Catholic parents the conflicting demands of work, and/or leisure activities, pose a barrier to regular attendance at Mass.

Non Family-Friendly Masses

The other major concern for Catholic parents was previous experience of attending Mass with small children:

[We go] once a month. Well, since First Communion we have been a couple of times. We try to sometimes, [it is] difficult as we have two little ones. When we get there it is usually ok, but one of us will have to walk out because x are crying or kicking...it is just hard.

I wouldn't take all my children to Mass because they wouldn't behave and because there would just be me to keep an eye on them, because my husband doesn't go. He is a Catholic, but he can't be bothered.

¹⁷ See Appendix F.

Many parents maintained that other members of the congregation did not appreciate having young children at Mass:

Some of the older people are not always terribly friendly. They are very “tutty” about the children being in Mass. In their day they might have sat still, [but] children aren’t expected to do that anywhere else now. [It is] hard to take them and make them do that in church.

The thing I like least about Mass is you want your children to be there [in Mass], but they find it boring. You feel under pressure to keep them quiet. You might have someone tutting or looking at you. You are aware someone is looking at you. It is just the pressure. It is so much hassle to get all of them out of the house and get them all there. It is just an hour of stress unfortunately.

Another Catholic parent expressed the view that it might help if the children were more involved in Mass: ‘A lot of people are stuck in their ways. Things I feel really sad are that they don’t like children reading, because they say [children] stumble over their words’. It is impossible to confirm independently whether other people were showing their disapproval, or whether the parents perceived that to be the case. In either case, this perception has become an obstacle for some parents with young children to attend Mass. The view that young children were not welcome in Mass echoes an opinion expressed frequently by Catholic parents that the parish community was of a different generation to themselves and did not understand young families.¹⁸

Lack of Knowledge of What to do in Mass

An underlying concern for some Catholic parents who did not often attend Mass was that they had limited experience of Mass, and were concerned that they did not know what to do during the service: ‘...because I haven’t been to church for so long, I feel terrible I do not know what to do in church. It is fear.’ Another Catholic mother expressed the sense of fear she experienced in attending Mass:

When I walked in there I didn’t really know what I was doing. I know it sounds silly but which door to go through and there wasn’t anyone there to say ‘come this way’. So I was quite scared and I was being really brave. I want to start taking the

¹⁸ See Chapter 5.

children there, but it was uncomfortable when you don't know what you are doing. There is that scariness of just not knowing what to do when to sit down, kneel down, and do prayer - I don't always know that. I felt really silly in parts of it because I didn't know what I was doing and it is not a nice feeling.

In all the Catholic primary schools, some Catholic parents expressed a concern that they did not know what to do at Mass. Some explained that when they went to a school Mass in church they would sit where they could see the head teacher, so they would know when to stand or sit. Some headteachers and priests questioned whether a Mass was the most appropriate liturgy in a primary school setting for many parents who did not regularly attend Sunday Mass.

4.3 Attitudes to Sunday Mass Attendance

At least two different attitudes could be identified in Catholic parents' description of their views of Sunday Mass. Some Catholic parents identified themselves as 'less Catholic' than others because they did not attend Mass weekly. Other Catholic parents asserted a right to challenge or adapt the rules around Mass attendance. The majority of Catholic parents were aware that 'practising Catholics' attended Mass weekly, and some Catholic parents expressed the view that they were judged because they did not do so:

I believe in being a Catholic, you should go to church, but in some circumstances, it is not easy to go to church. I don't think you should be judged and say we are less Catholic than someone who goes to church every day, every week, is not [right].

One Catholic parent made the point that she no longer attended Mass, because she believed people were judging her:

What really stopped me [going to Mass] was the First Communion lessons. I felt so negative about them it put me off going to church. It is just the guilt all the time. [They spent] half the lesson saying you people who don't go to church. I feel guilty because I think they are looking at me, because they haven't seen me at one of their churches. That shouldn't be what it is about. I felt that there was so much guilt. My husband works. He is gone half six to half seven every day. I have four kids and no family. Everything is on me, and it was just another thing

on me and I just felt it is all too much. I am just failing at it so I may as well not do it; I am never going to be getting it right. The last communion meeting it was like, you should be here, you do need to find the time and there is no excuse, but there are excuses, that is life. I thought we weren't supposed to be judging each other no one is perfect.

Some Catholic parents expressed the view that they believed they were 'less Catholic' because they only attended church occasionally and that there was a scale of Catholicity, in which they were near the bottom; Catholics who complied with the 'rules' were more Catholic:

I would say I was a very bad Catholic. I was brought up Catholic; I think my faith has got me through a lot of difficult times. I have had people who say you don't look like a Catholic.

This sense of being 'less' Catholic was often accompanied by a sense that compliance with the 'rules' about Mass attendance was easier for some, in particular, the older generation, than others.

Other Catholic parents expressed a different view in so much as they did not employ the metaphor of a scale, but rather had concluded that there were different sorts of Catholics; some who attended weekly Mass and others like themselves for who regular attendance at Mass was not part of their Catholic identity. If the first group expressed a view that they were judged for not complying with the rules of the church, this second group assumed the rules could be challenged, adapted, or did not apply to them. Some Catholic parents questioned why it was only Sunday Mass that 'counted':

I do understand why Sunday Mass is the most important Mass...[but] they should have a couple of other Masses in the week that you could say that you go to that shows you are a good Catholic...when you come to school applications Sunday Mass is what they look towards. I do make the effort, but...

Another Catholic parent had decided for herself to 'count weekday Masses'. She argued:

If we cannot make it on Sunday I will go on Monday lunchtime because in my world if Saturday evening is allowed, so is Monday lunchtime.

Other Catholic parents assumed that the ‘rules’ were relevant in the past or relevant for the older generation, but the rules were less ‘harsh’ nowadays:

I think another thing when you were younger; you had to go every Sunday, every single Sunday, whereas that is not the case now. We usually go once a month. I do make a point of trying to go once a month. One thing that sticks in my mind from when we would go to Mass as a child, every Sunday, we were never allowed any breakfast. We had an orange cut into four and we were allowed to suck the orange. [This] was a very firm rule of my Nan. I think well I [wouldn’t] do that to the children. It was very harsh.

Parents who had experience of Mass elsewhere, in Eastern Europe, India or Africa, perceived that rules governing Sunday Mass were different in England and Wales:

I was born and brought up in a [different] environment so have an attitude and respect for Mass. Here it is different even if [you are] born a Catholic [you] don’t go to Mass, [you] don’t talk about God. I see a few parents at Mass.

Some Catholic parents challenged the idea that being Catholic included regular attendance at church.

Someone asked me the other week, was I a practising Catholic. I said I wouldn’t answer because I think the term is divisive as it basically means do you go to church. Personally, I think it is irrelevant to whether you are a Catholic or not.

Another Catholic parent explained how she adapted the rules around life and priorities:

You know the rules, you should be going to church every week, bringing up your children as Catholic, practising what you have been taught. Having said all that you adapt your life around that, you do know what the rules are, but I am not saying I do all of them. I know what they are. Being Catholic is being a good person, knowing what is right from wrong, but I don’t know how that would be different from another religion. I think being Catholic it is more important to do things like give my friend a lift to a hospital appointment, than going to Mass on Sunday. I know that is the rule, but that is not the important thing.

A number of parents clearly articulated a disassociation of Sunday Mass attendance from a core Catholic identity. This raises many questions and challenges for the work of the New Evangelisation.¹⁹ The next two chapters explore opportunities for the Catholic Church to re-engage with baptised Catholic parents who are not frequent Mass-goers.

¹⁹ See Chapter 7.

Chapter 4: Sunday Mass: Questions for Ongoing Reflection / Discussion

1. What most struck you in what you have just read?
2. In what ways could a parish be more welcoming to non-regular Mass-goers?
3. What do you think are the key elements of a family-friendly Sunday Mass?
4. What opportunities for the New Evangelisation can you identify in the research findings in this section?
5. What might a possible pastoral response(s) be to one of the following:
 - None of the Catholic parents shared that they no longer attended Mass at all; the parents did not perceive themselves as ‘church leavers’. It is significant to observe the positive response from parents to a personal invitation to Mass.
 - The sacramental preparation time of First Holy Communion was a key moment when Catholic parents said they would attend Mass more frequently.
 - Excellent children’s liturgy was cited by some as the reason to attend Mass with their children.
 - The parents appreciated priests’ homilies.
 - Much of the involvement of parents with the Catholic Faith was viewed through the lens of their child’s faith needs.
 - Catholic parents also appreciated the opportunity to sing.
 - For many Catholic parents the weekend was determined by their children’s leisure commitments.
 - The other major conflicting commitment for some Catholic parents was paid employment at the weekends. A desire for a mid-week Mass was mentioned in two other areas. The timings of Sunday Masses are understood as not being family-friendly.
 - Many parents maintained that other members of the congregation did not appreciate having young children at Mass.
 - Catholic parents who did not often attend Mass were concerned that they did not know what to do during the service.
 - The majority of Catholic parents were aware that ‘practising Catholics’ attended Mass weekly, and some Catholic parents expressed the view that they were judged because they did not do so.

5. Catholic Parish Community

One aim of this research was to investigate the ways in which the Catholic Church in England and Wales could seek to re-engage with Catholic parents. It is interesting to observe the ways in which the participating Catholic parents described their sense of belonging to the Catholic community. The call to be part of a Christ-centred community of faith is an essential element of Catholic doctrine.

Every person born, formed and nurtured grows in relationship to other people...our 'sense of community' is not one of a collective of individuals but a community of mutually dependent persons. (Nichols, 2007)

Traditionally, the main way of fostering a sense of belonging to the Catholic community was through links with the local parish community.

This section explores the ways that Catholic parents expressed a sense of belonging to the parish community; secondly, consideration is given to Catholic parents' perceptions of not belonging to the parish. The section concludes with a reflection on the importance and the fragility of a sense of belonging to Catholic parish community.

5.1 A Sense of Belonging

Some Catholic parents who attended Mass regularly did speak about a sense of belonging to the parish community. Several Catholic parents expressed a sense of belonging to the parish community through their relationship with the priest and parish members, for example, in relation to the parish priest:

I feel I belong as I see Father around whether it is after school, in the shop or anywhere. He knows my name. He baptised both my children.

In all the participating schools Catholic parents commented on the importance of personal relationships. The presence of the parish priest in school was important, both formally and informally, talking to parents at the school gate, and/or having lunch with the children in school. This contributed to a sense that he was 'their' priest, in a way that the parish church or the parish community was not viewed as 'their' church or community. A sense of belonging to a community can be created through personal relationships (Walker, 2011). A few parents mentioned relatives who regularly attended church. One mother explained that her main connection to the parish was through her elderly mother, and she surmised that

when her mother was no longer there she would have no real connection to the parish. In two areas, within the Catholic primary school there was a parent liaison officer, or pastoral worker, who functioned in both parish and school. These individuals were key figures in developing a sense of belonging to the parish community.

A sense of belonging with the wider Catholic Church was expressed mainly through a sense of connection to Pope Francis; it was interesting to note that parents spoke of 'our' Pope, as they did 'our' priest. Some of the Catholic parents' spoke positively of Pope Francis' impact on the Catholic Church:

Pope Francis knows what is best. [Q]

I think he has made a terrific start. He seems more humble and normal so that ordinary people can listen to his message and be inspired by him. More of the same I think. [Q]

Pope Francis is doing a brilliant job. [Q]

Your papacy has awoken hope... that the Church can heal itself and bring healing to the world. Call on the Holy Spirit more and more for yourself and all of us. [Q]

Other parents suggested he should do more to modernise the Catholic Church and make it relevant to young families:

Give people advice on how to live their faith to help others rather than focusing on rules which are unhelpful to others. [Q]

Find a way to encourage younger parents especially ones that have been baptised and do not carry on their faith, try to encourage people to keep their faith up and keep attending Mass. [Q]

I think Pope Francis is trying his best. I would like the Catholic Church to be known for helping in the community in all respects not for being intolerant. Jesus was kind to all the 'outcasts' of the community not something we are seen as a Church for. [Q]

A selection of some more of the Catholic parents' views of Pope Francis and hopes for his leadership of the Catholic Church can be found in Appendix E.

Some parents achieved a sense of belonging with the parish through engagement with a particular group of parishioners; some Catholic parents belonged to an African and Caribbean group that offered support:

When people are mourning, when they are sad or happy we are there for each other. We do all sorts of things to support each other.

In Church of England parishes, research has found that occasional churchgoers often have a strong sense of belonging expressed in attachment to the parish church building (Walker, 2011). A similar strong sense of attachment was not found among any of these Catholic parents. In four out of the five Catholic primary schools, headteachers and priests stated that Catholic parents were more willing to attend meetings and events when held on school premises, than those in the parish church.

5.2 A Sense of Not Belonging

Many Catholic parents expressed a weak sense of belonging to the parish community. Regular attendance at Mass did not always engender a sense of belonging to a parish community. One Catholic parent explained how she did not feel she belonged to any particular parish, although she went to Mass every weekend. She attended Mass in about five different parish churches, choosing the Mass time that fitted in with the family schedule that weekend. Another parent who regularly attended Mass, explained:

I don't feel like I belong. I go for Mass, but I don't feel I am part of it and I don't feel I can get to be part of it.

Some Catholic parents explained that they attended Mass in the parish church linked to the Catholic primary school, rather than the church near their home and this meant that they had a sense of belonging to neither:

We are a little bit out of touch with this [parish] community, because we do not live in this parish but we come to this parish because the school is in this parish.

A sense of belonging to [the school parish] is less as the children get older and are no longer at a Catholic school.

I only go to Mass if I am going with the school, so I am probably not involved with the parish as I could be.

A common response was that the Catholic parents did not know people in the parish: '[we only know] people we sit near [in church],' compared to the Catholic primary school where they 'knew everybody'. One Catholic parent explained when she had attended Mass in the church:

I don't know the people who come to Mass. We don't stay at the end for tea or coffee. We have to get back.

This sense of not knowing other parishioners was common. Some Catholic parents were aware that the parish did welcome newcomers, and created ways to meet other parishioners, through social gatherings such as teas and coffees after Mass.

Lack of Communication

There was a perceived lack of communication between occasional Mass-goers and the parish community. Many Catholic parents maintained that they did not know what was happening in the local parish. Often the main source of their information was the Catholic primary school newsletter. One parent pointed out that if you did not attend Mass you did not receive the parish newsletter:

I wouldn't have a clue because no one really tells you that. If you don't go every week, you don't get the form [parish newsletter].

Few Catholic parents were aware of the parish website, and only parents who had seen the website had used it to find Mass times or telephone numbers. Other forms of social media were not considered as a means of connection with the Catholic parish, although one parent did suggest a community blog might be a useful way of keeping in contact. The majority of Catholic parents wished to receive more information about the parish through the Catholic primary school newsletter or website. Contact with the Catholic school community was maintained through newsletters, word of mouth, use of the website, email, and SMS texting. Contact with the parish community relied on the newsletter distributed at Sunday Masses. A consequence of this for occasional Mass attenders was that they did not receive regular information about the parish community.

The Wrong Generation

Many Catholic parents held the assumption that the Catholic parish was run by, and for, an older generation who were regular Mass-goers. One Catholic parent explained how she believed the parish to be welcoming and friendly, yet she did not feel involved in the parish:

I don't know if it is because I am young or what. Everyone is very friendly to me and they will say hello and things like that, but I just do not feel they involve me in what is going on. I wouldn't even know what is going on in the church.

Other parents claimed that the older people did not appreciate having young children in church: '[The older generation] run the place. There is no involvement for children'. There was a common perception that the regular Mass-goers did not view these young Catholic parents as part of the parish. One Catholic parent, when discussing her sense of not belonging, questioned whether the local parish congregation would see the Catholic parents at the Catholic primary school as part of the parish community.

5.3 Parish Activities

A sense of community can be achieved by being involved in community activities and such a sense of involvement contributed to Catholic parents' sense of belonging to the Catholic primary school community. Few Catholic parents in this study were involved in parish activities. The most common activity for Catholic parents to be involved in was children's liturgy. Many parents enjoyed this role; one parent claimed preparing her children's liturgy lesson was the way she learnt about her Catholic Faith. Other parents expressed the view that helping with children's liturgy was the only area of the church that they were 'allowed' to help with. One Catholic parent, explained that having IT skills, she had offered to help with the parish newsletter, but it was suggested instead that she could help with children's liturgy, which she declined. These Catholic mothers believed that there was a need to broaden the ways in which the Catholic parishes could encourage them to contribute.

Some participants had desired to take a more active part in parish activities with the majority seeking to be involved more in catechesis, family activities, and helping other people within the parish: 'I have worked away so it is difficult to be involved but I would like to help with baptism classes'. Some Catholic parents who did want to be more involved expressed the view that they did not know how to, nor did they have sufficient confidence:

I would like to be a bit more involved. I would like to be a reader in the church, just to show a bit more commitment, but I don't know how to go about it.

I am not a confident person. When you go to church and they talk about certain things that are going on. I have always wanted to go on the trip to Lourdes, always wanted to do that. I think it is because I am just not confident in life, especially since I have been out of work for so long.

Some Catholic parents argued that they were actively discouraged from being further involved in the local parish:

The whole kind of participation of the church is moribund; you have these quite elderly people not letting a new generation to take part. At least if there is an opportunity to take part it is very much on their terms, for a very specific action. There is no transparency and there is no route into participation.

Maybe the older people would like more integration, but I tried to help out and went along to a meeting. It was made very clear to me that I was much too young and not the sort of person they wanted. So, I haven't been back.

However, it must be recognised that the majority of Catholic parents did not want to be more involved in the parish community; some argued they had no time to be involved in the local parish:

I just go for Mass. [I do not have] much time to be more involved. I have a full time job and work night shifts.

I think that pressures on people of my age for all sorts of reasons aren't right. It is a fact that time is at a premium. I know you get out of it what you put in. I don't really have any excuse not to do it. We go and see [a housebound older lady] every now and again. It is about helping, just encouraging people to think broadly about what they can do. I wouldn't like to be more involved. I am doing more than enough.

The results of the survey suggested that the majority of Catholic parents do not have a strong sense of belonging to the local parish community and do not seek to create one. The American sociologist, Bellah, defined community as:

A group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision-making and who share certain practices. (2007, p. 333)

However, this traditional definition of 'community' was not one that the Catholic parents surveyed seemed to subscribe to. This was not the situation as described by the Catholic parents surveyed. A key question to be considered is: how can interest in, and desire for, parish community be stimulated?

In the past, the Catholic community was seen to have a distinct set of beliefs, values, and behaviour, including for example: attendance at Mass on Sunday; expectation of lifelong marriage; and rejection of abortion and euthanasia; beliefs about the nature of God; Christ's death and Resurrection (Morris, 1998, p.92). The majority of Catholic parents did not perceive themselves to be sharing a distinct set of beliefs, values, and behaviour or as being involved in decision making in the parish. A possible reason why the Catholic parents do not have a strong sense of community within the parish could be that they gained more support and identity from other communities to which they belong (Pretty, 2007).

The following section considers the religious literacy of Catholic parents, which may have a bearing on their connectivity to their local Catholic community, as found in the parish network.

Chapter 5: Parish: Questions for Ongoing Reflection / Discussion

1. What most struck you in what you have just read?
2. What are some of the most successful means of communication between a parish community and non-regular churchgoers?
3. What practical measures can a parish put in place to serve the needs and use the gifts and talents of all members of a parish community?
4. What opportunities for New Evangelisation can you identify in the research findings in this section?
5. What might a possible pastoral response(s) be to one of the following:
 - Several Catholic parents expressed a sense of belonging to the parish community through their relationship with the priest and parish members.
 - In all research areas, Catholic parents commented on the importance of personal relationships. Some parents achieved a sense of belonging with the parish through engagement with a particular group of parishioners.
 - A common response was that the Catholic parents did not know people in the parish, compared to the Catholic primary school where they ‘knew everybody’.
 - There was a perceived lack of communication between occasional Mass-goers and the parish community. The majority of Catholic parents wished to receive more information about the parish through the Catholic primary school newsletter or website.
 - A parent liaison officer or pastoral worker, who functioned in both the parish and school, were key figures in developing a sense of belonging to the parish community.
 - A sense of belonging with the wider Catholic Church was expressed mainly through a sense of connection to Pope Francis.
 - Contact with the Catholic school community was maintained through newsletters, word of mouth, use of the website, email, and SMS texting. Contact with the parish community relied on the newsletter distributed at Sunday Masses.
 - Many Catholic parents held the assumption that the Catholic parish was run by, and for, an older generation.
 - Few Catholic parents in this study were involved in parish activities. The most common activity for Catholic parents to be involved in was children’s liturgy.

- Catholic mothers believed that there was a need to broaden the ways in which the Catholic parishes could encourage them to contribute. Some Catholic parents who did want to be more involved expressed the view that they did not know how to.
- The majority of Catholic parents do not have a strong sense of belonging to the local parish community and do not seek to create one. How can interest in, and desire for, parish community be stimulated?

6. Religious Literacy

This research aimed to investigate the ways in which the Catholic Church in England and Wales could seek to re-engage with non-churchgoing Catholic parents. One area where many Catholic parents requested a greater support from the Catholic Church was ongoing formation in the Catholic Faith. Adult catechesis, education, and formation are terms, which are sometimes used interchangeably. In the course of this section, the term 'adult faith formation' will be employed. Adult faith formation is not an activity confined to study in a classroom; it encompasses the acquiring of knowledge, skills and experiences of the Catholic Faith; it involves the sharing of a lived experience of faith through study and encounters with Catholic teaching, practices, liturgy, prayer and through fellowship with fellow Catholics. In its early stages:

...comprehensive formation includes more than instruction: it is an apprenticeship of the entire Christian life, it is a "complete Christian initiation", (204) which promotes an authentic following of Christ, focused on his Person; it implies education in knowledge of the faith and in the life of faith, in such a manner that the entire person, at his deepest levels, feels enriched by the word of God; it helps the disciple of Christ to transform the old man in order to assume his baptismal responsibilities and to profess the faith from the "heart"; (205)

(General Directory of Catechesis, 1997, n.67)

As such Adult faith formation is essential to the work of the New Evangelisation in helping people to grow in faith so as to become mature and missionary disciples of Jesus Christ. Adult faith formation is therefore offered to Massgoing Catholics, and also to those who have drifted away from practice of the Catholic Faith but may be seeking to re-connect with parish life. Of the latter:

This in fact constitutes a mass of "non-practising Christians" even though in many hearts religious feeling has not been completely lost. Re-awakening these to the faith is a real challenge for the Church.

(General Directory of Catechesis, 1997, n.25)

This section considers: Catholic parents' desire for further formation in the Catholic Faith; explores their existing sources of knowledge and experiences of the Catholic Faith; and reflects on the parents' motivation for continued learning. The term religious literacy or religious literate is employed to refer to knowledge and experience of the Catholic Faith.

6.1 A Desire for Learning

A lack of knowledge and a desire for learning about the Catholic Faith was a factor in many of the discussions with Catholic parents:

I think times have changed; generations have changed. I just don't know if it is the same sort of beliefs what my Nan and Granddad and everybody [had], if that is all the same and if everybody's attitude is the same as it was then.

Many Catholic parents expressed a desire to learn more about their faith:

I would like a bit more education on it [the faith] so I can understand the things that my kids say, instead of me saying to my kids what is that.

Catholic parents expected their views and understandings of the faith to be acknowledged:

[We] need more of those things where adults explore, not in a condescending way, [but] recognising that your understandings and interpretations are valid, giving you tools to look at the Gospels.

6.2 Learning Experiences

Adult Education

A few of the Catholic parents had experience of adult faith formation classes. One parent explained she had attended a course held in the Catholic primary school:

I was learning from the course Come and See. I did learn a lot because it was a very small group and I could ask questions. I felt comfortable about that.

Another Catholic parent described a different course she had attended:

I have been to some scripture meetings but [he] has done them at university level, which for the general person is over the top. It needed to be made clearer. It needed to be more like, this is what we are doing and explained what you can get out of it.

One Catholic primary school had unsuccessfully tried to set up adult faith formation classes for their parents, and had no response from the Catholic parents. In two other areas, headteachers, priests, and pastoral workers explained that they had been unable to find

suitable resources that would engage the interest of their parents; too often resources assumed a level of general literacy and religious literacy that was not appropriate. Another major barrier to involvement in adult faith formation courses was the timing of the sessions, for parents with young children evenings are difficult times:

Time is an issue with learning about faith. It might be interesting, but to find time to fit that in your life's schedule would be hard. I have done two baptism courses for my daughters.

Headteachers, pastoral workers, and priests explained Catholic parents would attend liturgies, events, and courses like sacramental preparation, to support their children, but parents were less likely to do so for their own benefit.

Intergenerational Learning

Catholic parents were experiencing and learning about the Catholic Faith from their grandparents, parents, and from the children and the Catholic primary school. For some Catholic parents, there was a clear line of transmission from older relatives to themselves:

[I learn from] my mum because she is a convert so she is quite keen on being Catholic.

Another parent stated:

[I learn] from my mother-in-law, she is really highly religious and at the moment we are living with her.

The influence of grandparents was important as one young Catholic mother explained:

My Granddad would get out his Bible. He has a very old Bible from Ireland, and he would sit me down and we would have Bible lessons. I still go over there, and we talk and if there is a question that I don't know, I know Granddad will know. I sometimes don't fully understand it, but he will reassure me.

The influence of grandparents is important, parental influence was less apparent. Some Catholic parents explained how their parents did not regularly attend Mass; indeed one parent explained how her father had started to come back to Mass at the time of his grandson's First Holy Communion.

Learning From, For and With the Child

The majority of Catholic parents were gaining knowledge, understanding, and experience of the Catholic Faith from their children, and from the Catholic primary school:

I would say I learn most through my children as [what] they ask always seems to evoke from me discussions that I feel teaches me about my own beliefs and faith.

Catholic parents were discovering or re-discovering Bible stories: ‘I love the Bible stories. I hadn’t heard of half of them until my daughter said, “mum have you heard this?” Several Catholic parents suggested that their children knew more about the Catholic Faith than they did:

[My daughter] just comes home and says random things; she probably knows more than I do. [I learn] mostly from her when she comes home from school.

Many Catholic parents explained how they would often learn alongside their child discussing faith:

Especially Christmas, Easter, or any special saints days that they are learning about at school. I try to talk about them at home as well. We do the Wednesday Word and the children like to do the puzzles. I think it is very important.

Other parents mentioned reading the Wednesday Word newsletter with their children:

The kids bring home leaflets like the Wednesday Word, and make me do the crosswords. The kids read them. They like doing the little word searches.

[My children] like to do the Wednesday Word search. I sometimes read it. It is sometimes interesting. It talks about the readings they do in church.

The Wednesday Word²⁰ is a newsletter distributed weekly by two of the Catholic primary schools in the research. It aims to deepen parents’ faith through encounter with the Gospel, and to establish a time within the family for discussion of faith. The focus is on the Gospel, on the person of Jesus, and on a reflection on the meaning of Jesus in a person’s life. The newsletter is given as a gift in a paper copy; it is recognised that the majority of these Catholic parents will not proactively seek out Catholic Faith material on the web. For many

²⁰ <http://www.wednesdayword.org/>

Catholic parents this was the only information and education in the faith that they received each week.

The Catholic parents in this study spent some time in the week talking to their child about faith, in an environment where both were learning. A key time when these faith conversations between parent and child increased was at the time of sacramental preparation for the First Communion:

When B was doing his First Holy Communion, we were speaking about [the faith] all the time. He is a deep thinker and he wanted to talk about it a lot, we had books.

This was often a time when Catholic parents were interested in learning not only with the child, but also for the child, to support him/her in their sacramental preparation:

At the moment, my eldest is doing her First Holy Communion so this is going to be my big learning [time] as they are doing parent sessions.

A child's First Holy Communion was valued by all the Catholic parents and they all wanted their children to make their First Holy Communion. The parents were involved in the sacramental preparation programmes, which they attended for the sake of their child; many claimed to be learning about the Mass and the Catholic Faith in the process. Some priests and headteachers pointed out that Catholic parents, who did not attend church, still expected their child to 'make their First Holy Communion'. For many Catholic parents First Holy Communion was the logical next step after baptism, it was part of being Catholic, but also, the Catholic parents wanted the child to have the same experience that they had had as a child. It was a part of the memory of the Catholic Faith tradition, which the parents wanted to pass on.

Organisation of the sacramental preparation programmes varied in the different parishes. In one Catholic primary school, the parents described positive experiences of their child's First Holy Communion preparation, which was undertaken in the form of a family catechesis program. The sacramental preparation programme focused on family catechesis where parents and children learnt side by side. The Catholic parents described the last 'lesson' that they had had. This involved a treasure hunt in the parish church, where child and parent explored the church, learning in the process about, for example, the purpose of the font. This model of shared learning benefitted both child and parent; the latter was able to learn about

the Catholic Faith in a non-threatening way. In learning with the child, parents were showing the child the importance of learning about the Catholic Faith. The family catechetical programme not only taught both child and parent about the meaning and symbolism of the parish church; it also made the church ‘a less scary place’, somewhere parents could ‘feel comfortable’. This was appreciated by all the Catholic parents involved; it enabled the parents to learn at the same time as the child, but also to gain confidence in matters of faith. It alleviated a concern that many Catholic parents had that their child knew more about the Catholic Faith than they did. Many of the Catholic parents interviewed did not ‘feel comfortable’ in the parish church, in the same way that they ‘felt comfortable’ in the Catholic primary school community.

In another area, the sacramental preparation program, where children and parents learnt separately, was not so positively received; several Catholic parents expressed the view that the catechists’ expectations were too high. Some parents argued it was unrealistic to expect them to be able to attend Mass every Sunday.

The Media

Some Catholic parents were learning about the Catholic Faith from the secular media:

I read the papers. For example, ‘The Times’ had a big thing on the [Pope’s] survey [on family life]. I thought, it was interesting how I learnt about it there. I don’t think I know enough about it from church or from school.

Some Catholic parents’ mentioned the secular media portrayal of the Catholic Church as an intolerant Church. One parent mentioned the Catholic television channel EWTN (Eternal Word Television Network), but no other references were made to learning from Catholic media outlets such as Catholic websites, or social media.

6.3 Religious Literacy Needs

A reading of parents’ comments in the previous sections of this report, will give rise to some concerns for Catholic religious educators and evangelists about the general level of religious literacy among this sample of Catholic parents. The headteachers and the parish priests who contributed to this research claimed one reason for a low level of religious literacy among many Catholic parents was that the parents’ formation in the Catholic Faith was often “completed” when they finished primary school education. However, on a positive note the

survey responses suggest that there is a desire among Catholic parents to learn more about the Catholic Faith. The motivation for this is largely to support the faith formation of their child. Many Catholic parents are “learning” and experiencing the Catholic Faith in conversation with their child, in attending sacramental preparation classes with their child; parents are learning about Catholicism for the first time or remembering from their childhood Bible stories, Catholic prayers, practices, and doctrines.

Many Catholic parents stated that they learnt about the Catholic Faith from going to Mass. Some Catholic parents described times when they had learnt about Catholic Faith when the priest had involved the children in the Mass. However, many more Catholic parents suggested that ‘what to do in Mass’ was one area that they would like to learn more about; they wanted to have a basic understanding of the structure and meaning of the liturgy. Many Catholic parents expressed this as a desire to know when they had to stand, sit, or pray during Mass. Another area that many Catholic parents wanted to know more about was how the Church had changed since their grandparents’ time.

This desire for learning more about the Catholic Faith has major implications for New Evangelisation. Whilst acknowledging that every individual has a unique faith journey, this research suggests that there is a need to develop new ways of nurturing adult faith formation among Catholic adults. In turn, resources need to be created to support adults, which address both the spiritual needs of the adults as well as children. Many of the participating parents displayed no clear understanding of the Catholic Church’s teachings and practices today; this extended to a lack of understanding about the significance of the Eucharist.

Chapter 6: Religious Literacy: Questions for Ongoing Reflection /

Discussion

1. What most struck you in what you have just read?
2. Where do you learn about the Catholic faith?
3. What practical ways can a Catholic primary school and parish work together to more effectively involve Catholic parents in the teaching and learning of the Catholic Faith?
4. What opportunities can be identified for the work of the New Evangelisation in Catholic primary schools?
5. What might a possible pastoral response(s) be to one of the following:
 - Parents expressed a lack of knowledge and a desire for learning about the Catholic Faith.
 - Catholic parents expected their views and understanding of the Faith to be acknowledged.
 - Too often resources assumed a level of general literacy and religious literacy that was not appropriate.
 - A major barrier to involvement in adult faith formation courses was the timing of the sessions because for parents with young children evenings are very busy.
 - The majority of Catholic parents were gaining knowledge, understanding, and experience of the Catholic Faith through their grandparents, parents, children, and the Catholic primary school.
 - Many Catholic parents explained how they would often learn alongside their child. A key time when faith conversations between parent and child increased was at the time of sacramental preparation for First Holy Communion. This model of shared learning benefitted both child and parent; the latter was able to learn about the Catholic Faith in a non-threatening way.
 - Some Catholic parents were learning about the Catholic Faith from the secular media.
 - Many more Catholic parents suggested that ‘what to do in Mass’ was one area that they would like to learn more about; they wanted to have a basic understanding of the structure and meaning of the liturgy.
 - Many had no clear understanding of the Catholic Church’s teachings and practices today.

- This research suggests that there is a need to develop new ways of nurturing adult faith formation among Catholic adults. In turn, resources need to be created to support adults, which address both the spiritual needs of the adults as well as the children.

7. Reflection on the Implications of Findings for New Evangelisation

Introduction

This final section considers the implications of the findings of this research for the New Evangelisation in England and Wales. One of the main aims of the New Evangelisation is to reach out and support Catholics at the margins of practice, Catholics who have become distant from the parish life. The research process has generated rich narrative data and the findings provide a useful insight into the beliefs and attitudes of a small sample of Catholic parents in England and Wales. The limitations of this case study must be acknowledged. It is not possible to draw general conclusions from such a small sample. However, the data is of great value as it raises many questions with regard to the challenges and opportunities for the work of the New Evangelisation. The first half of this chapter provides a brief summary of the findings, it will focus on the Catholic parents' expressions of faith, experiences of adult faith formation, attitudes to Sunday Mass and the parish community, and experiences of the Catholic primary school as a Catholic community. The implications of these findings are considered in the final section of this chapter.

7.1 A Brief Analysis of the Findings

Catholic Parents' Expressions of Faith

Many Catholic parents found it difficult to articulate what they believed; their faith was not something many had thought about, or that anyone had ever asked them about. The Catholic Faith they described was fragmented, flexible, and adaptable. Nevertheless, it retained recognisable elements of the Catholic Faith, such as the belief in the God of love, Jesus as moral exemplar, and the importance of prayer. The survey responses confirm the findings of previous research (Andersen, 2010; Casson, 2011, 2012; Dixon et al., 2007; Fulton, 2000; Hoge, 2001; Inglis, 2007; Rymarz & Graham, 2006) that suggests that young Catholic adults hold a fragmented approach to faith; the Catholic Faith is not viewed holistically. However, in an age when 'de-conversion' has in the minds of some commentators become normalised in Catholic culture, (Beaudoin & Hornbeck, 2013), it is important to note that these Catholic parents were not de-converting, that is to say they are not dis-affiliating from the Catholic Church, their Catholic Faith-is important to them²¹. The Catholic parents' understanding of

²¹ Appendix D contains a selection of Catholic parents' comments on the importance of faith.

faith should be viewed through the lens of ordinary theology; that is the theology of those who have ‘received little or no theological education of a scholarly, academic, or systematic kind’ (Astley, 2002). Ordinary theology often appears confused; it focuses on the concrete as opposed to abstract, yet an understanding of ordinary theology can illuminate academic Christian theology (Astley, 2002).

A proposed question to investigate further is whether the Catholic parents retain a ‘thin’ rather than ‘thick’ Catholic identity (Schweitzer, 2007). It may be that new pastoral strategies need to be created to reflect this new understanding of Catholic identity, which is echoed among Catholic secondary school pupils²² (Casson, 2011). The majority of Catholic parents understood their Catholic Faith in terms of family heritage, and the Sacrament of Baptism. Several Catholic parents expressed their Catholic identity in terms of upholding Catholic values. Ammerman (1997) describes this as ‘Golden rule Christianity’; it focuses on doing good deeds as opposed to subscribing to a set of beliefs. It is a view of religion as ‘right living’ rather than ‘right believing’ (Ammerman, 1997). Some Catholic parents described themselves as ‘lesser’ or ‘bad’ Catholics and some retained a Catholic identity primarily through association with the Catholic primary school. Pastoral practice must recognise the variety of ways that Catholic parents understand their Catholic identity, and be aware of the possible fragments that are selected or not selected to create these Catholic identities. A major challenge for New Evangelisation is that Catholic parents are assembling their own version of Catholicity that is perhaps more loosely defined than in previous generations. It is largely understood: ‘[not] as a sacred trust, but as an ethnic-cultural heritage, a fund of memory and reservoir of signs at the disposal of individuals’ (Hervieu-Léger, 2000, p.168).

There are a variety of possible responses to this challenge. One response could be to provide more opportunities for catechesis for parents and children. Another could be to view this as an opportunity to reflect on the fragmented understanding of faith of young Catholics, and engage with them by focusing on the fragments that they still value. There are, for example, opportunities to build on Catholic parents’ valuing of informal prayer in daily life, which provides both an occasion to understand the ‘ordinary theology’ of young Catholic adults, and a practical opening to provide relevant and accessible resources to support Catholic prayer life.

²² The categories identified were Hardcore, Golden Rule, Family heritage, Baptised Catholic, School Catholic, Halfway, Catholic atheist, and Pilgrim.

Questioning Authority

Many of the Catholic parents asserted a right to question the authority of the Catholic Church and to adapt ‘Church rules’ to their needs and circumstances. There was a perception that the ‘rules’ applied in the past, were imposed on them, and it was ‘easier’ for other Catholics such as priests and the older generation to comply with the ‘rules’. In addition, there was a perception that Catholic parents’ views of the Catholic Church’s teachings and practices were not being heard and importantly, that they had a right to be heard. An individualistic and critical questioning approach to the Christian Faith presents both challenges and new opportunities for the work of the New Evangelisation.

Transmission of the Faith

The survival of any society is conditional upon the regular and uninterrupted transmission of institutions and values from one generation to the next (Hervieu-Léger, 1998, p. 213). The understanding of the Catholic Faith displayed in the survey responses, questions the strength of the chain of transmission, from the past generation to the future generation. Further investigation may be warranted into what makes up the ‘memory’ of the Catholic Faith for these parents, so as to inform new outreach initiatives and pastoral strategies. Previous research has shown that Catholics of this generation have only ever encountered weak religious socialisation (Rymarz, 2012, p.111). The Catholic parents surveyed were aware that they had a key role in the transmission of the faith to their children, although some Catholic parents held the view that this was the prime role of the Catholic primary school. Many Catholic parents maintained that they did not know enough to be confident in the task of transmission.

Adult Faith Formation

Catholic parents were not actively seeking out education in the Catholic Faith, but they were encountering and learning about the Catholic Faith from, with, and for their child. The parents reflected on their own faith in response to children’s questions, and gained knowledge and understanding through their child and the Catholic primary school. Parents were learning with their child, in particular at the time of the First Holy Communion; they attended sacramental preparation classes so they could tell or show their child ‘the right way’. The majority of Catholic parents stated that they were interested in learning more about the Catholic Faith and practices, the prime reason being to support their children. Examples of

positive experiences of faith learning highlighted by Catholic parents were: discussing their faith with their children; reading the Wednesday Word newsletter²³; and participating in a family catechesis programme. Some of the Catholic parents received the Wednesday Word newsletter from the Catholic primary school. It contains the weekly Gospel readings, a reflection on a weekly Word in an accessible format and word puzzles. Reading the Gospel message with their child was a means of learning about the Catholic Faith, and encouraged reflection on faith issues. This was simple, effective, and a non-threatening way of sharing the Catholic Faith. It is an instrument of adult faith formation which reaches many parents who would not otherwise engage with the Catholic Faith. Another positive learning experience highlighted by Catholic parents was a family catechesis programme. One of the strengths of this approach was that child and parent learnt together in a welcoming, friendly environment. The information was presented in a format that was accessible to both child and parent, and the parent was motivated to learn to support their child(ren). The low level of religious literacy amongst young Catholic adults raises concerns and suggests a need to develop more opportunities for family-centred learning activities.

The Parish: Sunday Mass and the Occasional Mass-goer

A key finding of this research, which confirmed existing anecdotal evidence, was that the majority of Catholic parents were not regularly present in their local Catholic parish, either as Sunday Mass attenders or as attendees at parish activities. However, the Catholic parents did not identify themselves as having left the Church and would not have accepted the label of non-practising. This calls into question the relevance of the use of descriptors such as practising/non-practising, lapsed and non-churchgoing. For these Catholics on the edges there was no clear in/out doorway. It is important to move away from the use of what might be perceived as labels, in support of the Catholic Faith of baptised Catholics who occasionally attend Mass. An aim should be to build a model of Church, which does not focus on boundaries:

...but rather takes its form from its central reality the Trinity's love of all people and the outpouring of that love into all corners of human living. The church is a centred rather than bounded reality. (Watkins, 2012)

²³ <http://www.wednesdayword.org/school/>

The belief that reception of the Eucharist is the ‘source and summit of Christian life’ was not reflected in the Catholic parents’ understanding of Mass. The Eucharist was understood as being an important Catholic sacrament to which their Catholic children should have access, and the Mass as a ritual which provides a sense of spiritual well-being. The majority of reasons given for attending Mass however focused on the child. The desire for a family-friendly liturgy and congregation was reiterated many times. Children’s liturgy was a divisive issue, some parents were critical of its quality, for others it was recognised as being of positive benefit to their child.

A key moment in changes to Catholic parents’ attitude to Mass was when their first child engaged in sacramental preparation for First Holy Communion. For the majority of parents interviewed, this was a time of learning about the Mass, and the Catholic Faith, and a time when they attended Mass more frequently, although frequent attendance did not often continue after the completion of the sacramental preparation time. The major barriers to Mass attendance described by Catholic parents were a lack of time, or conflicting commitments such as paid employment or children’s leisure activities. Some Catholic parents identified themselves as ‘less Catholic’ because they did not regularly attend Mass. However, for many of these Catholic parents being a ‘good Catholic’ did not involve attending Mass.

The Catholic Church places the Eucharist as ‘the source and summit of Christian life’ but this is a message not reiterated by many of the Catholic parents in this research. The majority of Catholic parents in the research sample were occasional Mass-goers. Their irregular attendance is an indicator of a widely-shared view that going to Mass is not an essential part of Catholic identity. It is an opinion common to many British Christians. Francis and Richter’s (2007) survey of over 800 church leavers concluded that 75% held the view that you do not have to go to church to be a good Christian. Many young Catholic adults are not convinced that going to Mass is an essential element of the Catholic Faith, and when obstacles are placed in their way, they have limited motivation to overcome them. (Rymarz & Graham, 2006, p.183-184).

The Parish Community

A clear pattern emerged very early in the research process. There was a clear differentiation between the Catholic parents’ expressions of a deep sense of belonging to the Catholic school community, and their expressions of a weak sense of belonging to the Catholic parish

community. A sense of not belonging is a major obstacle to the success of the New Evangelisation as a Christian's life is lived out in community, in relationship with others. A Christian life without the active support of a Christian community is more difficult to maintain, 'a member of the lay faithful can never remain in isolation from the community, but must live in a continual interaction with others' (*Christifideles Laici*, n.20).

A sense of belonging to a community such as a parish is created through a sense of shared beliefs and values, and through active participation (Bellah, 2007). Catholic parents maintained that they did not 'know' many people in the parish community; they perceived the parish community to belong to a different generation and they did not know what was happening in the parish. Where there was a sense of connection to the parish it was framed in terms of relationships with key figures, such as the parish priest, the pastoral worker, and/or a relative who attended regularly. The majority of Catholic parents were not involved in parish activities and did not wish to be more involved. Traditionally it had been assumed that young Catholic adults would become more involved in parish communities as they married and started a family. This is now being questioned and it is probable that Generation X will retain their loosely affiliated individualistic critical approach (Davidson, 1998).

The Catholic Primary School

The reasons that Catholic parents choose to send their children to a Catholic primary school are varied; some Catholic parents choose a Catholic primary school to reinforce the Catholic Faith that their children experience at home and in the local parish. However, many baptised Catholic parents choose a Catholic primary school, but do not regularly attend Mass or participate in the local parish community. Many Catholic parents seek out the Catholic school for reasons other than religious belief; indeed moral values and academic success are often a greater priority, than the transmission of the faith tradition (Freund, 2001). Many Catholic parents in this research, however, did share that they chose Catholic education as a means to transmit the Catholic Faith to the child. Catholic parents expressed a desire for a sense of continuity with their childhood experiences, and appreciated that the Catholic primary school provided an encounter with the Catholic Faith for their child in the form of teaching the faith, offering experiences of the liturgy and access to sacramental preparation, and a sense of belonging to a Catholic community. The Catholic parents identified several ways in which a Catholic primary school contributed to creating a strong sense of a community. These included: having an effective two-way communication system; actively inviting parents to be

involved in the Catholic school; encouraging parents to participate in Catholic liturgies; and offering opportunities for parents to take courses in parenting skills, or in arts and crafts. One of the key factors to note was that the Catholic parents became involved by invitation from the Catholic primary school. Another important factor identified by parents in supporting this sense of Catholic community was the presence of a key individual, a pastoral worker/parent liaison officer; an individual who 'knew' the parents by name and who supported their family in the Catholic primary school community.

All the parents who contributed to this research expressed a positive view of the Catholic primary school and had a strong loyalty to their school. It was in the Catholic primary school that they experienced a Catholic community. The Catholic school is a community in which 'belief in God is the norm' (Francis & Robbins, 2005, p. 122). However, for some Catholic parents, the Catholic school was the only environment in which they personally experienced belief in God as the norm. The headteachers, parish priests, and pastoral workers who have contributed to this research were aware of this pivotal role, and sought to strengthen their relationships with parents in a variety of ways. However, many Catholic parents viewed the Catholic nature of the school as something that was created, imposed from outside, not as something in which they played a vital part. The Catholic ethos of a Catholic primary school is inevitably created by an interaction of all participants, ethos is not something that can be imposed on people, determined by those in authority, and transmitted to all participants (Donnelly, 1999). If this definition of ethos is accepted, then Catholic parents participate in the creation of this ethos. If the parents' Catholicity is weakened then that will affect the Catholicity of the Catholic school community as a whole. Consequently, the Catholic school has to work hard at animating a religious dimension (Rymarz, 2012, p.118).

For some Catholic parents, the Catholic school was maintaining and transmitting the memory of the Catholic tradition. It was fulfilling a vicarious role (Davie, 2000) holding the faith tradition for those who themselves might not practise or believe, but want their child to have access to the moral values and attitudes associated with that tradition. According to Richard Rymarz, this vicarious role was the reason why 'Catholic schools in many parts of the western world exist as perhaps the most tangible part of the religious memory' (2012, p.113).

The findings of this research have provided an insight into a small sample of Catholic parents' relationships with the Catholic Faith and the Catholic Church. The next section will explore the implications these findings have for New Evangelisation within the Catholic

Church in England and Wales. Three areas have been identified: a desire for learning (religious literacy); a sense of not belonging to parish; and the Catholic primary school as a Catholic community.

7.2 Implications: A Desire for Learning

It is an area of concern if the only expression of Catholicity in the lives of many Catholic parents is when they talk about the Catholic Faith with their children. There is a need therefore to create more fora for Catholic parents to discuss issues of faith with their peers and with other members of the Catholic community. If Catholic parents are learning about their faith from, for, and with their children, then it is important that the Catholic Church explores the creation of new ways to support family catechesis.

New Evangelisation should be given expression on two levels, with young children and with parents (Wuerl, 2013): ‘religious socialization of children can ... no longer leave out a critical retrospective view of the story of the faith of the adults themselves’ (Roebben, 2013, p. 88). For adult faith formation to be effective, it must be sensitive to the religious literacy of the Catholic parent, recognising that each individual’s spiritual needs is unique, and each individual is at a different place on their faith journey. A way forward for the New Evangelisation in England and Wales could be an audit of resources that support adult faith formation. It is well recognised that Catholic parents have a crucial role in the home/school/parish triangle. However, this research suggests that more could be done to foster growth in faith among Catholic primary school parents on a strategic level.

7.3 Implications: Challenging a Sense of Not Belonging

It must be acknowledged that the sense of not belonging to a parish community expressed by many of the Catholic parents provides a major challenge for the work of New Evangelisation. This challenge can be addressed in a variety of ways, which are not mutually exclusive. One response is to recognise that attitudes to Sunday Mass will not be changed solely by focusing on ways to make Sunday Mass more attractive to occasional Mass-goers. The issue goes much deeper: there is a need to engage with weak religious socialisation; with the individualistic, pluralistic, and anti-authoritarian attitudes held by some Catholic parents. It may appear that there is also a need to enhance levels of understanding about the centrality of the Eucharist in Catholic life. Another response could be to recognise that for many parents going to Mass this may be the only time in the week when they experience a time of stillness

and quiet. This has implications for the development of the work of New Evangelisation, for example, through the provision of innovative ways to meet parents' desire for times of stillness in their busy lives.

The perception of the parish community as belonging to the older generation presents a challenge for New Evangelisation. One possible response is to recognise that there is an opportunity for parish communities to listen to the concerns of Catholic parents with regard to developing family-friendly environments within the parish church. Some kind of quality-controlled provision of children's liturgy and investment in appropriate and engaging resources could provide an opportunity to work with both children and parents at parish level. There is an ongoing need to reflect deeply on understandings of Catholic identity formed outside the framework of the parish community and to explore opportunities for evangelisation outside the 'parish boundaries'.

The sense of not belonging to a local parish is a concern. Baptised Catholics who are 'loosely connected yet satisfied' see no need for renewal (Rymarz, 2012, p.114). It is thus difficult to engage with them. There is no seemingly immediate motivation, from their point of view, to contribute to a parish community. A belief in a right to challenge and question Church authority is not new. Often it is through questioning that we all come to more deeply understand and experience Truth, but there is a need for the Church to explore how it can engender a sense of belonging among this constituency of parents. The importance of relationships in evangelisation has always been recognised as crucial, 'with a very few exceptions a person comes to believe under the influence of others' (Ritschl, 1984, p. 49 cited in Astley, 2002). The key relationships between occasional Mass-going Catholic parents and the parish priest, a pastoral worker, a member of the Catholic school staff or relative who were involved in parish activities, provide an opportunity to develop a greater sense of Catholic community.

7.4 Implications: the Catholic Primary School and New Evangelisation

The findings show that the Catholic parents who chose to place their child in a Catholic primary school were not hostile to the Catholic Faith. Many may be indifferent, but some were seeking to deepen their understanding of the Catholic Faith. A major implication for developing the work of the New Evangelisation is that for many young Catholic parents the Catholic school is their only connection with the Catholic Faith (Rymarz, 2012, p.113). Many

headteachers, school chaplains, religious education coordinators and school staff, are working to ensure the Catholic primary school successfully creates a Catholic environment where people feel they belong. They are aware that its role in the home/school/parish relationship is pivotal. The concern is that if the Catholic primary school is the sole maintainer and transmitter of Catholic memory for some Catholic parents, then the Catholic primary school is presented with the challenge of being the main provider of a holistic experience of the Catholic Faith to Catholic families. According to Kathleen Engebretson (2008, p.159) the Catholic school cannot provide the depth of the Catholic Faith tradition that can be found in an active Catholic community; the Catholic school cannot be a substitute for the Catholic Church and parish life. The Catholic primary school must therefore, be supported in its role in the work of the New Evangelisation and be encouraged to foster partnerships with local parishes. A suggested area to be explored further is the identification of effective means of strengthening the relationship between Catholic parish communities and Catholic primary school communities.

The Catholic primary school acts as a threshold space between secular society and the Catholic Church; many Catholic parents remain on this threshold. The task for the Church is to resource this threshold space. James Sweeney describes the image of the Catholic Church as:

the place where people find room to establish their individuality while remaining in communion with others; develop their 'self' while being capable of abandoning themselves; be fed by a vision of growing their true selves, their souls. (Sweeney, 2013, p.159)

Bert Roebben employs the image of the narthex, literally the entrance of a church building, as 'an image of the religious learning process' (2013, p.16). The narthex is not a stepping-stone into the Christian faith; it is a space for anyone 'to look at it [life] from a completely different perspective.' The Narthical space model acts as a bridge between the sacred church and the secular world (Roebben, 2013, p.124). This narthex or threshold space would facilitate experiences of the Catholic Faith; it would presume no pre-knowledge or faith understanding; it would presume no quantifiable outcome such as increased numbers at Sunday Mass. However, it would offer an opportunity for baptised Catholic parents and their children to encounter the Catholic Faith in an accessible way. Within this threshold space, opportunities could be developed for faith conversations - encounters with the Gospel message through, for

example, the sharing of Wednesday Word newsletters. Experiences of the liturgy of the Catholic Church could be provided including prayer, para-liturgies, and celebrations of Mass and encounters with members of the parish community could be arranged in informal settings. Opportunities could be created for engaging faith formation activities such as family catechesis programmes, and ‘bite-size’ adult education classes. It is essential that threshold spaces be created to meet the needs of Catholic parents. It is apt that the Bishops’ Conference Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis has named its outreach initiative to non-churchgoing Catholics ‘Crossing the Threshold’; it focusses on helping parishes to identify and create such threshold spaces.

Franchi (2014) argues that Pope Benedict’ XVI’s Courtyard of the Gentiles initiative ‘is an opportunity for the Catholic educational community to re-consider its purpose as an ecclesial agent in a plural society’. Catholic schools could be open to dialogue with secular culture and contribute actively to the work of the New Evangelisation by presenting Catholic thought to all. The threshold space envisaged above would focus more on baptised Catholic parents who seek to encounter the Catholic Faith in practice, in everyday life, rather than intellectual debate. There is a need for the provision of appropriate and accessible resources to enable Catholic parents to grow in faith. The work of the New Evangelisation should also empower key people within Catholic primary schools and Catholic parish communities to reach out to parents - ‘this applies not only to teachers, but also to parents and students’ (Rymarz, 2012, p.117). However, it is imperative that all New Evangelisation initiatives in Catholic primary schools reflect in content the faith, practice and theology of the Catholic Church. Therefore, there is a need to empower as many people as possible in the Catholic school community to understand fully the theological context of New Evangelisation and its practical out workings. One method of doing this is through the Theological Action Research process developed by the *Action Research: Church and Society* team at the Heythrop Institute of Religion and Society²⁴. It provides an opportunity for theology to ‘interact actively with culture’; it seeks ‘to enable the Christian practitioner to articulate faith – to speak of God in practice’ (Cameron et al, 2010, p.21).

New Evangelisation is not a programme to be imposed, but it is the duty of all baptised Catholics to play their part in it. Indeed, in the words of Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*:

²⁴ Theology Action Research at Heythrop College <http://www.heythrop.ac.uk/research/heythrop-institute-religion-and-society/arcs-project/theological-action-research.html>

In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. *Mt* 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelisation, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelisation to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelisation calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n.120)

No one response will meet the needs of all Catholic parents or function in all Catholic primary schools. Of potentially greater benefit would be for each Catholic primary school and parish to create their own threshold space in response to the particular needs of baptised Catholics in that locality. Such an initiative could draw on the knowledge and experience of the team coordinating the existing Bishops' Conference 'Crossing the Threshold' Project which, with a breadth of partners, is already developing materials and strategies to support parishes to reach out to Catholics who never or rarely attend Mass. Working closely with the Bishops' Home Mission Desk, this case study was commissioned by the Bishops' Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis as an integral part of the 'Crossing the Threshold' Project. In addition to that, there are complementary initiatives being developed by members of the National Core Group for ministry and outreach to non-churchgoing Catholics, the Bishops' Conference Marriage and Family Life Project Office, in liaison with the Catholic Education Service, who have all been involved in and supported this piece of work. The same applies to a sample group of Diocesan Directors of Education, parish priests, and headteachers of all the Catholic schools involved in this research. Insights shared by Rt Rev Nicholas Hudson, Dr Clare Watkins and Dr Oonagh O'Brien were also invaluable.

New Evangelisation invites a new way of reflecting on the role of the Catholic home, parish and school in the mission of the Church; it 'is a lens through which are viewed opportunities to proclaim the Gospel anew' (Wuerl, 2013, p.129). It is our shared task.

Conclusion

This research study has shed light on the views and attitudes of a sample of Catholic parents in Catholic primary schools in England and Wales, but as with all research, it has also highlighted areas in need of more investigation. The findings highlight issues of importance to the Church's ongoing mission. It may well be of value to conduct a parallel piece of

research among Catholic parents who do not send their children to Catholic schools, to compare the findings with those who do.

This research has explored the Catholicity of Catholic parents, who no longer regularly attend Sunday Mass every week; it has investigated the connections they value with the Catholic Church; and considered how the Catholic Church could strengthen its relationships with Catholic parents. This in-depth qualitative research of the religious beliefs, attitudes, and practices of parents in Catholic primary schools, aims to assist mission and pastoral planning, to serve and benefit all those who will shape the future of the Catholic Church in England and Wales.

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Appendix A: The Catholic Primary Schools

The Catholic parents who contributed to this research were drawn from the five provinces of England and Wales: Birmingham, Cardiff, Liverpool, Southwark, and Westminster. The Catholic primary schools were selected to represent the diversity of Catholic communities across England and Wales. Selection was made through word of mouth, recommendations by members of the national core group and diocesan evangelisation staff, with the Catholic primary schools selected situated close to active parish communities.

School A was situated in a suburb of a large city in the North of England. The majority of pupils were white British; a high proportion of the children were eligible for free school meals. Two-thirds of the pupils were baptised Catholics. The head teacher spoke highly of the excellent contact and relationships between the priest and school community.

School B was situated in a suburb of a city in The Midlands. Around two-thirds of the pupils were white British; other pupils are drawn from a wide range of ethnic groups. An above average proportion of the children were eligible for free school meals. Two-thirds of the pupils were baptised Catholics. The head teacher and parish priest worked closely together to develop the Catholicity of the school.

School C was situated in a small rural town in Wales. Over four-fifths of the pupils were white British. The Catholic primary school had a large catchment area. Just over two-thirds of the pupils were baptised Catholics.

School D was an inner city school in the South East of England. Around nine-tenths of the pupils were from ethnic minority backgrounds. An above average proportion of the children were eligible for free school meals. The school was over-subscribed; the majority of pupils were baptised Catholics. The head teacher and parish priest were actively engaged in developing parish and school links.

School E was situated in a commuter town in the South of England. The majority of pupils were white British. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals was below the national average. Around three-quarters of the pupils were baptised Catholics.

School F was added at later stage in the research process to obtain a greater contribution from rural Catholic communities; it was a small school situated in a rural market town in the North of England. Three-quarters of the pupils were white British. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals was around the national average. Nearly half of the pupils were baptised Catholics.

Appendix B: The Catholic parents

39 interviews were conducted in the six primary schools in the autumn term of 2013. The interview length ranged from 20 minutes to an hour, with average length being 35 minutes. 107 parents responded to a short qualitative questionnaire distributed (electronically and in paper form) by the Catholic primary schools to Catholic parents. The total of number of participants was 146 parents.

Gender

Female	85 %	Male	15%
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Age

25-34 years	19%	35-44 years	52%	45-54 years	29%
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Religion (Self- identified)

Roman Catholic	85%	Protestant denominations	8%	Christian	5%	Atheist	2%
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Reception of Sacraments (questionnaire respondents only)

Baptism	94%
Confirmation	70%
Holy Communion	80%
Marriage	56%
Reconciliation	50%

Parents' education

Catholic school 56%	Non- Catholic school 44%
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Appendix C: Sample of interview questions

Catholic Parents in England and Wales

A research project commissioned by the Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis,
Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

Catholic Primary School

1. Why did you choose a Catholic primary school for your child?
2. What makes a Catholic school a good Catholic school?
3. In what ways do you feel involved in this Catholic school community?

Catholic Faith

4. In your opinion, what does it mean to be Catholic?
5. Where do you learn about the Catholic Faith?

Sunday Mass

6. Have you recently attended Mass in the local parish church, in school, on holiday, or elsewhere?
7. What do you like and what do you dislike about going to Mass in a parish church? How often do you attend Mass in the local parish church?
8. Can you think of anything that the Catholic Church could do to encourage young Catholic parents to go to Mass more often?

The Parish Church

9. Are you involved in your local parish community? Why/ Why not?
10. What do you think is the best way to keep in touch with what is going on in the parish?

The Future

11. What advice would you give Pope Francis to make the Church more relevant to your life?
12. Why do you want your children to learn about the Catholic Faith?

Appendix D

A selection of questionnaire responses to the question: Why is faith important to you? (71 out of 107 provided a written response)

<p>Faith helps you in life</p> <p>My faith kept me strong and sane when it came to this country on my own under difficult circumstances.</p> <p>Because it has changed my life in a wonderful way.</p> <p>It helps me.</p> <p>My faith helps me to grow closer to God, gives me peace when I am troubled and in distress.</p> <p>Growing up with a strong faith and Catholic values have helped me get through challenging experience in life.</p> <p>Faith gives you hope.</p> <p>My faith has got me through difficult times in the past, not sure how people without faith manage. It gives me security.</p> <p>Because, it is always with me.</p> <p>It gives me the strength to live.</p> <p>It helps me in times of need.</p> <p>It is easier for me to understand something that happens to me in life.</p> <p>I find comfort in knowing that I can pray to God at all times, when things are going well and not so well and that I will not be judged.</p> <p>It helps me make decisions. I think it shapes my personality & makes me better at my job.</p> <p>I can forget my problems when in my church.</p> <p>Without faith I would struggle with the futility of life.</p> <p>My faith is the centre for my life. It gives me the strength and courage to keep going.</p> <p>Mass centres me and refreshes me for the week ahead.</p>	<p>Moral guidance</p> <p>My faith defines my values.</p> <p>It is my approach to life.</p> <p>Having a faith makes me a better person.</p> <p>Because it includes many values.</p> <p>Because all my life I followed the Catholic principles.</p> <p>I was brought up in a large Catholic family and we went to church each week. The values I have today were taught to me by my family and Catholic education - honesty, kindness, treat others with respect, do not hurt people etc.</p> <p>My faith is important for me because it is part of my life. I like praying to God, speaking about my problems. With God, my life is better.</p> <p>It is my guide through life.</p> <p>It is more important to me to live following the guidance Jesus gave us.</p> <p>Faith values/commandments are my guiding principle in life.</p> <p>There are two elements to faith; faith in self and your ability to sense, judge, read, and grasp things, and faith in God I have both.</p> <p>It is true, tells us what we should do, and gives meaning to our lives.</p> <p>My faith is part of who I am: it defines my personality and sets me apart from other people.</p> <p>As stated previously, I feel my faith is important in being a good person, thinking of others, doing whatever I can to help others etc. and leading a good and moral life, not necessarily the "being a Catholic" bit. Personally it's important I don't feel I need to attend church for this.</p>
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Appendix E

A selection of questionnaire responses to the question asking for advice for Pope Francis

<p>Praise for his continuing work in the Catholic Church</p> <p>Pope Francis knows what is best I think he has made a terrific start. He seems more humble and normal so that ordinary people can listen to his message and be inspired by him. More of the same I think. Pope Francis is doing a brilliant job. Your papacy has awoken hope... that the Church can heal itself and bring healing to the world. Call on the Holy Spirit more and more for yourself and all of us. Remain on the same path. Continue. Remain focused and steadfast. Be a good leader. Be yourself and maintain Catholic values. I strongly feel that Our Pope should keep the strong values and beliefs handed down from St Peter in that the Catholic Church should not change to suit the people and their secular ways, but that the people should change to follow Our Lord and make Him the centre of their lives.</p>	<p>Care for the poor and needy</p> <p>I think Pope Francis is trying his best. I would like the Catholic Church to be known for helping in the community in all respects, not for being intolerant. Jesus was kind to all the 'outcast' of the community, not something we are seen as a Church for. I think this pope is really trying to bring the focus back to the things that are important: poverty, kindness, love, and tolerance to me those things are about being Catholic. Consider first the imperative to care for others. Money is not the most important thing in life. Share with the needy. Divest the Church of its wealth and recognise the damage that certain aspects of Catholic teaching are doing to minorities and people in the Third World. [He should] focus on the vulnerable; on poverty, I think he is brilliant.</p>
<p>Create a family-friendly church</p> <p>It all starts from the family, need to start teaching the parents, involve them more at the church, and give them more encouragement and showing them right ways. Find a way to encourage younger parents especially ones that have been baptised and do not carry on their Faith. Try to encourage people to keep their faith up and keep attending Mass. I do believe that if the Mass times were more family-friendly and in line with the 21st century, (taking in account children's weekend activities) more families would go to Mass. Invest more on children's education. Welcome younger people, be non-judgemental & recognising that every individual has their own way of sharing faith & love for God.</p>	<p>Modernise</p> <p>Modernise and if you are going to reach out to people, you have to be in the way society is moving. We need to modernise the Church, to bring old values into now. Modernise, e.g. allow priests to be married thus not expecting them to live in an unnatural state. I believe priests should be able to marry - many good people have been lost to the Church because they want to be with someone they love. The alternative over time is that churches close or lay people conduct their own limited services, surely a married priest is the better option! Keep on encouraging the use of lay folk in the Mass.</p>

Appendix F

A selection of questionnaire responses to the question: ‘What would you wish to change in your life?’ (75 out of 107 responded)

<p>More time</p> <p>More quality family time due to cost of living impossible.</p> <p>Having more time to spend with my kids.</p> <p>Cutting down my time at work and working less at the weekend.</p> <p>More domestic help, more planning so I can have more time on family activities.</p> <p>More time for family.</p> <p>More time less work.</p> <p>It would be better when my husband could have more time /work less but this is impossible. Somebody must work and earn money.</p> <p>Create more time for my family than I do at present because of work commitment.</p> <p>More time with family.</p> <p>To give more time to what I believe in.</p> <p>More hours in the day.</p> <p>To work less hours.</p> <p>Be more organised.</p> <p>More time!</p> <p>Have more time to do things.</p> <p>More hours in a day.</p> <p>Spend more time together.</p> <p>Spending less time in work.</p> <p>More time with family.</p> <p>Change to part-time job only.</p> <p>Finishing work early to be able to spend more time with my children.</p> <p>Working less.</p> <p>I would like to spend more time with my children and my husband cause we both have long hour jobs.</p> <p>Having a (part time) job.</p> <p>If I could afford to work p/t and have more time at home with child.</p> <p>More sleep!</p> <p>More time at home as I often have to work away.</p>	<p>More faith</p> <p>Devoting more time to Bible reading.</p> <p>Praying always.</p> <p>Giving alms.</p> <p>I wish I could visit sick people in their houses and pray with them.</p> <p>Love your neighbour help people who are in need.</p> <p>Patience and understanding with each other.</p> <p>Love understanding and support to one another.</p> <p>Attending church every week.</p> <p>Being more connected to God.</p> <p>Continue to encourage myself and my family to make prayer as daily habit.</p>
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