

## Share your thoughts summaries

1. During the pandemic what strengths did you find in your faith and faith community? In what ways did the grace of God most clearly touch and uplift you? How might you have been disappointed or sorrowful?

I enjoyed walks outdoors in nature and Trish's daily reflections.

To be honest I did not really rely on my faith during the pandemic – it was something outside of my control and I had to rely on the experts. Perhaps my faith in God gave me the underlying attitude that it will be sorted in a way we can live with. But I missed the routine and the community of coming together for Mass.

I felt the Church was making its best efforts to stay in touch with parishioners, and to support worship, while respecting the restrictions that were in place to limit the spread of the virus. As a member of our Church choir I was happy to take part in recording hymns etc to support the masses. My biggest sorrow was when our daughter was unable to spend Christmas 2020 with us.

The pandemic and life circumstances allowed a pause and enabled time to reflect on life, God, the importance of this, and faith. I have been most impacted and uplifted by emotions I feel when focussing on the Lord, especially having had the gift of receiving the Lord at home via Trish. I continue to pray for something which gives me sorrow and I feel (guiltily) I'm not heard or am not praying properly.

Strengths – reflecting on my faith while in the complete lockdown.

Disappointed – Not seeing other members of the parish for a friendly “hi” each week.

Uplift – knowing that there will be a cure/vaccine and we will all see each other again.

It was early in lockdown. I was in my front room praying when there was a distinct image of a blackbird on the window pane. The thing is it stayed there for about half an hour so I could not? It was a Saturday and there was something going on in the Church.

Kept reminding myself if I have faith I will be OK. Our Church having faith and kept open. Teams came to help this success.

Strength – The way people were considerate to each other. Sorrow – If God is a God of Love why does he allow this to happen to innocent people?

Being asked to record hymns for the Masses was quite a challenge at first but became quite inspiring with the beautiful words of some of the hymns.

My faith and trust in God (especially the Holy Spirit) was a great help to me during the pandemic. Thankfully, I never felt disappointed but was sorrowful that so many people all over the world were suffering and dying from covid.

Ordinarily I would have been upset if I had been unable to attend Mass on a Sunday or certain other days (not only days of obligation). During the closure of Churches I read the Mass texts and felt content, while hoping to be able to return to Mass soon.

I found the efforts made by my faith community really supported me. Daily Mass was key to the day and I did feel part of the universal Church.

Offers of help in the Church and community. Just before Easter a person who had left the Church confided to me that they intended to return to the Church. I was disappointed as I was not able to attend Mass.

Listening to Mass on the computer, the voice of Fr Tom brought enormous comfort to us. It brought us closer together as a couple. Our candle was burning, we followed Mass with our Missals. The disappointment was not being able to see. We are not on Social Media and did not want to connect to any other person's Social Media. Our Parish, in line with other parishes could facilitate by providing a webcam. The long term use in our community would be immeasurable.

I found faith to be the fundamental mental strength on to which I could rest my thoughts and worries. I was sorrowful for not being able to participate in the community Church gatherings face to face.

I felt strength from attending Mass online and receiving calls from parishioners which uplifted me. A sadness was a lot of time alone but I realised that God is always with us. I missed seeing my grandchildren but zoom helped a lot. I liked keeping in touch with people by phone as many did not use computers.

I appreciated the big commitment of our parish priests and pastoral team to keep us close with streamed Masses. Early morning prayers and spiritual reading outside on my own and walking to nearby woods with my husband was like extended sacred time. I find not being with people at Mass painful – I missed their presence and found sitting with the quakers via zoom meeting for worship relieved the ache of isolation, "sitting together in the light".

Livestream = Lifeline.

During the pandemic our Church quickly adopted Online transmission of Masses and we found ourselves participating in daily masses rather than our usual weekly mass.

The contacting of parish members by phone on an irregular basis was also welcome during lockdown.

Some Eucharistic ministers brought the Eucharist to individual parishioners.

Meditation at home was also practiced by us on an interpersonal basis and has been carried on since the lockdown period.

We were also challenged to record music at our home for use in connection with mass at times when singing was not permitted in Church.

Strengths. Masses on line and Daily Reflections. Gave a sense of connection and support.

In Spring 2019 I had the time to read "The Catholic's", by Roy Hattersley. Gave me an understanding of the strength of our Faith over the centuries, and a sense of being a part of something really big.

At times a feeling of panic. How will this all end.

Praying for a vaccine, and feeling sure we would get one.

I did not lose anyone, but felt sorrow at being apart from my family. Then there was the joy of meeting up again.

Mass via soundcloud, hymns and familiar voices, lifted my spirits, helped me to pray, made me feel less alone.

The daily reflections sent out by Trish gave me a focus and helped me to do something positive instead of feeling sorry for myself.

I often felt lonely because all my regular live contacts with friends had ceased. Only on zoom could my Creative Writing course continue.

I had been hoping to visit members of my family after years apart, but that too was not possible.

Being able to attend Mass in a covid safe way was wonderful.

By the 'Church' and those who administer to the Word. Not listening?

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Awareness of the fragility of life. Reflect & change. Kindness, patience, not take things for granted. Thankful. We are here as “temporary residents”. Restrictions, nonsensical, everchanging rules. Forced distancing of families.

## 2. What gives you joy in belonging to your Parish or community?

Seeing friends.

Music – but I sometimes think we do not need to sing all the responses etc every week.

I met people of all ages and all backgrounds.

I feel welcome without feeling forced to join in.

I can find opportunities through Church to reach out and help others.

In our parish there are many groups committed to doing good work, and we have priests who are dedicated to our well-being. I'm sure the same is true in parishes all over the world. Unfortunately, all this good work is often overshadowed in the news by bad things that happen in the Church, e.g. child abuse.

The help I received throughout the pandemic; blessed and grateful to be “checked on” to make sure all was well. To feel cherished and a part.

Serving as an MC for Our Parish of Our Lord.

Knowing that there is always someone praying for the parish and for each other.

That it clearly cares for others, making sure they help the community.

Friendship, care, compassion.

When possible, being able to run the ‘Praise Group’. It's lovely to see people enjoying singing together.

The joy I receive is knowing that I belong to a very friendly parish and feel as if I'm one of a happy family. I also receive joy with the welcome I receive from the priests and other parishioners when entering Church and also listening to the music and singing.

Walking with people whom I know on walks that have good effects – mainly the choir and the healing services, but also the coffee after Mass on OWLS group Sundays.

My parish community is, for me, the Church. The care I see for all of us is how I believe the Church should be. In particular, I find joy in the way we are all accepted whatever our race, gender or sexuality.

By going to Mass & receiving the Eucharist and the joy of seeing someone receive Communion who previously had left the Church.

Our joy in belonging to our Parish community is a feeling of extended family. We care, our parish cares what happens to each of us. It brought sadness being disconnected from our Priests and parish family.

Knowing there is someone I can turn to when needed. To be able to listen to others' stories.

My joy was and is to go to Mass and receive the Eucharist. My joy in the Parish was being in the Bethany Club of good friends but it closed down due to the pandemic and so that closure made me sad. I missed having Church together with the elderly and the priests and enjoying the entertainment, etc.

Our Augustinians of the Assumption priests, who are our dear friends as well as our priests. The generations of families who have become I realise, my family over the last 36 years. Our hardworking pastoral assistants, whose love and commitment we experience daily. The parish outreach to the poor, the elderly, to everyone.

The fact that it is a community.

Interaction with parish members after Mass, but which is limited to those who attended at a particular Mass and came to the Hall for coffee afterwards.

We have organised and sung at a 'Praise Group' which meets monthly and sing hymns based around the liturgy of the weeks of the year. It's a joyful time albeit attended by a small group (10-14).

Some sermons are inspirational especially those that deal well with love, joy, trust and service. It must also be said that those which try to unstitch the more complex aspects of Theology or Old Testament texts are less well received especially since relating these to a modern context of life makes them fall short.

Joy from communal worship, especially when singing in the choir. Support of friends in the parish.

Sharing a common faith, a faith not shared by most of my family.

Feeling that we are a community who support each other, feeling like a family.

A sense of goodwill between us.

Speaking to people, helping them. Trying to be upbeat and positive and make people smile.

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Pulling together. Making Our Church covid safe. Belonging. Development of helping to feed the needy in the community.

3. When we say "our Church", who is part of it – and who is missing? What areas of mission might we need to develop?

Obviously, the age profile of those who attend Church is far too old.

Everyone seems part of it. For sure teenagers drop out but they will come back. The teenagers that stay seem to be those with a job in the Church – readers, sermon – we should encourage this role take up as they go to secondary school. Perhaps the youth should always help with the coffees, with reading, asked to join the choir.

At the top level I think of our Church as the whole Catholic Church, led by the Pope. At a local level I think of it as including all the practicing Catholics in our parish. Missing are the baptised Catholics in our parish who no longer believe, or maybe still believe but don't attend masses.

Our Church is the whole of the parish and the wider Christian community. Missing are those whose faith has waned or diminished. Our Mission should start by seeking them out and apply "listening" to them. Then, if possible, to address their issues in an effort to return them to the family of the Church. Many people today participate in things they either 'value', or it gives them something, or it resonates with them. The challenge is to seek to address this in today's busy world where many seem to have limited time. The family unit is a good start.

The Community. The Intercession of the Holy Spirit.

Home Visits or reaching out (the Church does some of this but only on the surface and I guess if they have the workers). Also I wondered if we asked if they like a home visit would they accept?

Me, my neighbours, everyone who wants to be. Missing – ages 12 to ?? Develop youth and young parents.

We need to stop talking about children being 'the Church of the future'. They are part of the Church now. They should be allowed to serve in any way that they are capable e.g. to be readers at any Masses, not just children's Masses.

I imagine everyone living in the Hitchin area (no matter what religion they are) are part of our Church community. Perhaps those that are missing are those who aren't in Church for the ceremonies. Perhaps by talking about our faith in general conversation may help in developing the areas of mission.

A stumbling block is the hierarchal nature of the Church. While this is not apparent in this Parish, the concentration of power in the hands of a few celibate men infantilises the rest of us.

The community who is attending Mass. The missing are the people that are the lapsed ones.

Our church community represents for us "People of God" coming together to celebrate the Eucharist and listen to the Word. We are saddened that families and young adults are missing from this privilege.

I see that everyone is part of "our Church" even if their opinions differ in some way. Being human is being and belonging to "our Church". Making the mission to be clear and not using language that may seem complicated.

The Community are those who attend regularly. The missing are those who don't come (lapsed) and many of the young people who are not attracted. I think if they could see more joy from us they would be attracted so we need to be more 'family', get to know people, our neighbours for example.

The young are missing seeing the gap between what they know of God's love and Church teaching. Remarried Catholics missing from our 'communion veil' due to Church teaching. Faithful LGBT+ Catholics – great in faith – but not welcomed due to current Catholic teaching but who know they are Beloved of God, but many and their families feel exiled, unloved, hated, reviled by words used by the Church.

All the people of the town who need to be loved!

Interaction outside Mass is slim.

Confession and Benediction hardly figure at all in the wider Parish and are arguably in need of revision to place them in a more modern context and suitable for all ages.

The development of shared Mission is a difficult concept but must remove the aspect of multi-tiered control management. 'Servants of the Servants' is a clear maxim.

The language of the Church is in many respects 'Old fashioned' and needs change to be attractive and understood by a wide and multi age level public. Pope Francis seems to me to have the right approach. Delivery of such language at Parish level would be a worthy ambition.

Those baptised into the Church. Many people come and go as life's stresses get in the way, or they return for the comfort and support the Church can give.

Areas to develop.... The Primary school gives the basics of our faith and encourages a caring attitude towards others.

Mums and toddlers, bereavement support, SVP, social groups for the mobile but isolated... would all benefit from further development.

Church with a capital 'C' I take to mean Catholic Church.

I now see 'Our Church' only as Christ. All the clergy appear to be concerned with upholding their 'positions'. Their listening is to the hierarchy of the Church – not to the people. Only Christ listened – he set the example and no one was turned away.

Church with a capital 'C' I take to mean Catholic Church.

But Church with a small 'c' to me means Christians of all denominations, and as such we have a common faith in Jesus Christ, even though we may have different ideas on how to follow Him.

Then there are our fellow humans of all the other world religions, or no religion, who are in their own way trying to worship God and do good. So I feel a connection to them despite my ignorance of their beliefs or customs.

People, building, all faiths. Missing – younger generation – priests, Church groups, future parishioners.

4. To what extent do you feel welcomed, loved and valued for who you are in your Parish or community?

Welcomed, loved and valued – yes. But also judged – not so good.

Very much so. People seem to look out for others. The way Trish organises us to help others – to give lifts, to visit housebound, etc - is great – it builds the community.

I have always felt welcome and valued in our Parish community. I was received into the Catholic Church in Hitchin. I think it is a welcoming community.

I do feel welcomed, loved and valued by the Parish and by my family and friends. On moving to Hitchin in 1987, it was a joy to find that the then Parish Priest (Fr. Robert) knew a dear friend. That personal connection was a wonderful introduction to the Parish. This continues.

Meeting people and joining in the prayers of the people for Good.

Welcomed; not so sure I can say loved or valued. This is very hard, love is to feel appreciated, cared for, prioritised, admired and understood. Do we for all? Valued; appreciated for your role in life. Do we or just those who help within?

I was made welcome from Day 1 because I help where I can I do feel valued. Do not know how those whose life only permits them to attend feel.

It seems strange to answer these questions at the moment. How can one feel welcomed by the segregation, masks and lack of singing.

The welcome I receive on entering Church makes me feel loved and valued.

For who (or what) I am, rather than what I can do – I think I am, by a small number of people, and that that is as much as most people can expect since it is not possible to know or be known by everyone in a parish as large as ours.

I feel all of those things in this parish and I hope that other parishioners feel the same.

Since the pandemic started two years ago we have been wearing masks which has kept us apart, social distancing was another reason.

Our parish community for us is “home from home”. We do feel welcome, and appreciated for any part we play however small within this parish community.

I feel very welcomed etc, in the Parish. But it is difficult to use the word “valued” in this context, all humans should be valued.

People I know are welcoming but I don't know many of the people really. The Covid doesn't help now as we have to be well apart with masks. I feel it's my own fault really as I need to work to get to know people and to 'travel together'.

I feel welcomed, loved and seen for myself in our parish community and other faith settings, committed to listening relationships. As a part of the Ministry of the Word in our parish I feel a strong bond of love and tenderness with the community to whom it is proclaimed. I am not a great socialiser or good at remembering names but celebrating the Mass and other liturgies with an open heart, in my parish, there is a beautiful bond of caring.

I'm content – pleased to be able to help.

The Christian Churches are shrinking fast. Why? We must find an answer to this and remove the feeling that we are a straight jacket where Theology and rules tops love, trust and personal involvement. This especially for younger people who often leave home and seek involvement with other people through social media etc.

All people have their own gifts and need to see that they can fit into a wholesome society that cherishes their gifts in an inter personal manner. Music, discussion groups, coffee mornings, etc. Interfaces such as RCIA maybe come later when they find out the people they like are in fact Christians.

Very.

To no extent now do I feel welcomed, loved or valued for who I am. When the opportunity was there to value me I was thrown aside.

In my parish I feel welcomed. I feel the friendship of anyone I talk to. In times of particular distress other parishioners have kindly listened to my concerns allowing me to 'get things off my chest'. Their patience has helped me to cope with life and cope with difficult situations.

To me their support is an example of selfless love.

Sense of belonging.

5. What steps might the Holy Spirit be inviting the Church to take in order to make our Parishes and communities more welcoming, inclusive and missionary?

I believe the Holy Spirit has brought to light the scandals of the past in an attempt to force the hierarchy to change, to accept the inclusion of the laity and women at all levels in all roles and with an equal say to those in holy orders in all matters. This would be a Church where all members felt welcomed, valued and heard.

People need to get to know people. I suggest use of a name label maybe one Sunday in a quarter or to have members of the parish give the sermon once a quarter – their reflection on the gospel (checked by Father Tom) – other ways to learn about each other – perhaps a parish directory on the website – you put a bit about yourself, how you might help with something small.

I think the Catholic Church could be more welcoming to Christians belonging to other Churches by allowing them to take communion, like the Church of England does.

The issues noted in (3) should be tackled. A number of other challenging subjects have likely caused attrition in members of the Church. For example, the following issues should be considered: married priests may encourage more priests to join. The subject of contraception and abortion. An adult balanced dialogue at the very least is needed. To act, to reach out to other communities, to break down barriers.

Start children to pray very young.

During Covid it would have been nice to see across the road in the park an open service so all can hear. Perhaps in the better weather we could do an odd service Mass in the park (Picnic Sunday) for all.

Not sure.

Perhaps some of the scripture readings could be changed. For example, some of the Old Testament readings seem to be incomprehensible and against a loving Church.

Will have to give this more thought.

When people move house, they sometimes neglect to join their new parish community. When a Methodist moves, the minister at his old Church writes to the minister at his new one, and the latter asks someone at the Church to help the newcomer to settle. One Methodist whom I knew gave a very positive account of this – found it very helpful. (Another disliked it greatly, but she disliked Methodism).

There is always more to do even in a parish that is welcoming and as inclusive as current regulations permit. I believe the Holy Spirit is inviting the Church to more fully embrace people who have remarried after divorce and also celebrate same sex relationships and marriage.

To call the Holy Spirit to give us the strength to go out to people more as a community. We need to be more inclusive with other Churches.

Faith is a journey. The road can be bumpy. Sometimes we need spiritual guidance to help us. We need to know what the Gospels are teaching, and how best we can live out the message in our sometimes chaotic lives.

I think the Church is being asked to use the language and thoughts of its participants. More of a “bottom up” approach rather than “top down”.

We have to ask the Holy Spirit to inspire us to go out to others to make a point of welcoming and listening to each other, to show more interest and care for each other and to be more economical and open to other faiths and more to help those in need which I feel our Parish is good at. We need to ask the Holy Spirit for the way forward.

See question 3 please. Use all of us laity – listen to our discernments made in prayer and listening to the Holy Spirit’s nudges. More inclusive language, accept God created women and LGBT people – loves them as they are – wants them to have fulfilled loving partnerships. Show this in Church teaching and inclusive language. Include all to the Eucharist to reflect Christ’s inclusiveness – all Christians – all Catholics.

Witness, witness, witness. Support disadvantaged neighbours!

Move to a more modern context of delivery of the Christian message. Emphasise the ‘We’ context and deal with the selfishness of the ‘I’ position as the dominant social position. This can be present in Homilies rather than always dealing with explaining the liturgy as the only factor in the Christian message. The Encyclical ‘The Joy of Love’ from Pope Francis seems to deal with this ‘Head on’ as to an extent so does the book Morality by Johnathan Sacks.

The hierarchy of ‘Old Men’ delivery is also uninspiring and arguably leads to the feeling of the Laity are a bottom level who should do as they are told. The Holy Spirit is badly needed here and in the long term needed also with the why priests cannot marry or why women should not be priests.

Would it be good / possible when new people register with the parish to offer them a visit by a parish member to welcome them and give parish/local information.

Now anyone who is not fitting the model the ‘Church leaders’ want to promote is ‘not listened to’. Cardinal Nichols did not listen to the Victims in the abusers case – he has subsequently continued to fail to listen. All the letters written to him were ignored.

Perhaps we could have a few more joint events with other Christians, such as prayer services.

Perhaps we could study the beliefs of other world religions to discover what we have in common.

Personally I feel that I have failed, by my behaviour and my lack of understanding and meaningful discussion, to pass on the teachings of the Church to my children. Mostly, their children are not baptised and are not being brought up to follow any religion. Also, I was not a very good listener.

So I think that deliberately setting aside a specific time for reflection, adults and children together, would have helped me, and perhaps would be of benefit to today's families.

Return of social home visits to parishioners – not just to administer to the sick/housebound.

## 6. What dreams for the Church do you have?

That it learns that change, even to ritual, is not a bad thing, that organisations that do not reflect long term settled changes in society will inevitably wither.

I worry that we will not have enough priests – fewer masses. I wish priests were allowed to marry or we had female priests – not just “mature” gentlemen. I would like sermons to be shorter and pointed. What should I do differently when I walk out of Church that day? It's hard to concentrate if the sermon is over 5 minutes.

I think the Catholic Church should consider allowing priests to marry, and should consider accepting female priests. I think the all-male celibate priesthood is off-putting to many people who might be interested in the Catholic Church.

The world holds the Roman Catholic Faith and the Pope in high esteem. It is respected. This should continue. The Church should aspire to represent the widest possible range within the modern community. To be the standard for Good, Empathy, Understanding and the betterment of mankind across all people, all faiths, of the world. All people should recognise this by the actions of the Church.

None.

Church unity.

People are willing but need help to manage commitments, so they can serve. The Holy Spirit reaching out to the people, gathering in, “the harvest is ripe but we don't have the workers” we need to call out. One big thing is how do we help the workers be of service?

Bring our children and young families back.

Different services could be devised around the 'Mass' part. We listened to the Mass everyday, on the 'cloud' while we were not attending Church and I found it very repetitious and it became more of a habit than a spiritual thing.

Hopefully to get more vocations to the priesthood and religious life. For more young people to attend Mass and the sacraments. That priests will receive more assistance from lay people.

A growth of healing ministries – both by relatively untrained ministers in the Church building and by trained counsellors. (The latter exist but are not well publicised).

Quite a few:

1. A Church where the Bishops support an inclusive lectionary so women are acknowledged.
2. A Church where all pastors, deacons, priests, bishops, etc, are open to women and men equally.
3. A Church where recent scandals (and any future ones) are acknowledged and openly repented.

That the Church would grow closer together.

Families are the bedrock of our faith.

For our Churches to be filled with enthusiastic families, happy to be at Mass they need more support and encouragement. Spiritual guidance.

This can come from the pulpit, our RC schools both JMI and Senior schools.

It could take the form of regular Family Masses with encouragement to prepare Liturgy and music.

In short, participation.

Making sure individuals are not feeling "alone" and allowing people to be listened to and the Church to be critically transparent and inclusive in decision making.

My dream is for peace among all people, that people would love one another, love animals and value our beautiful world and turn back to God. The fulfilment of Jesus' prayer:- "That all may be one".

A Catholic Church that starts to develop a healthier attitude to the gift of sexuality, celebrates it, talking more about the joy of relationship, priests and bishops being encouraged to be truthful and easy about their sexuality so human development in the Catholic Church is less distorted and contorted – but more as God intended. Let this be our penitential act in Mass. Let us acknowledge our sins, and the sins of the Church and Church Institutions, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries.

That my Church and all faiths become relevant and mainstream in society. That'll happen if we are outward-looking and active. Witness again.

That the Church can address all the issues raised above and that an inclusive society is recreated like that of the early Church where we all pray together and follow Jesus' teaching regarding love, trust and responsibility based on each's ability to serve. That all ages become involved as they are capable and not simply through tiers of knowledge via a few elderly people doing everything.

Dreams.....Women priests. Married priests. OPEN acceptance that NOT being heterosexual is the equivalent of being born with red hair or brown eyes, and NOT a sin. Willingness of the Church to speak out against immorality in public life (not people, but actions).

But having read "The Catholic's" I understand why this is not yet the case. But perhaps this can change.

The ET highlighted that a desire to follow a course was taken and no one listened. The Pope was intercepted – back to local Bishop – ignored! All the parents who wrote to Church hierarchy – ignored – no one wanted to listen – crying in the dark.

A Church which treats every human being with equal dignity.

A Church which always puts Christ at its heart.

A Church which recognises the work of the Holy Spirit everywhere.

A Church which is attractive to anyone seeking truth.

Allow priests the choice to marry and have children.