

# **BUILDING THE PARISH COMMUNITY FOR THE FUTURE**

**Report on the Parish Engagement Survey  
of the Catholic Community in  
Balwyn, Camberwell, Deepdene,  
Surrey Hills and Wattle Park**

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## Executive Summary

In May 2020, the Christian Research Association was commissioned by the Catholic Parish of Camberwell, Balwyn & Deepdene and Surrey Hills Wattle Park to undertake a survey investigating how the parish's mission through outreach, stewardship, worship, learning and participation is engaging within the local community. Volunteers were sought from individuals recorded in the parish contact database, and after five weeks, a total of 506 survey responses had been received.

Overall, two-thirds of respondents were aged 55 or older, almost two-thirds were females, three-quarters were married and 80 per cent were born in Australia. Almost half of the respondents (48%) identified with the Deepdene and Balwyn parish, while one-quarter identified with Surrey Hills Wattle Park parish and 14 per cent with Camberwell parish. The remainder identified with other parishes, connected virtually or were not aware of their parish.

The vast majority (93%) identified as Catholic, and nine out of ten respondents were baptised Catholic as a child. Over three-quarters of respondents prayed privately at least weekly, and a similar proportion said that faith was the most important or very important thing in life. They expressed their faith in many different ways, most commonly by attending Mass, praying regularly, displaying religious symbols in their homes and volunteering in the wider community. Three-quarters of respondents attended Mass at least monthly. Slightly less rated their parish community as moderately or extremely important in their life.

Respondents considered the main mission of the parish should be to create a sense of community among those who share the same faith, to celebrate Mass and to be a centre for social justice and outreach. When asked to consider the most important aspects of the parish, respondents noted being able to attend Mass regularly, friendship in community and being nourished through education opportunities, homilies & readings. However, respondents from different parishes prioritised different aspects.

In each of the five key areas of parish life, respondents were mostly involved in attending Mass (Worship/Sacramental), in the St Vincent de Paul Society (Outreach), welcome and hospitality (Community), in the parish school life and in adult learning (Learning), and in donating to the parish's stewardship program (Stewardship). However, many respondents in each of the key areas were not involved at all. On the other hand, overall, almost half of the respondents were happy with their current level of involvement in parish life.

A question was asked about communication preferences, and while many respondents used a variety of social media channels, they most preferred communicating via email.

The timing of the survey provided a good opportunity to seek feedback about how the parish had responded during the Covid-19 pandemic. Ninety-two per cent of respondents noted that the parish had done a good or excellent job during the pandemic. Two-thirds had attended Mass online during the period. Personally, respondents had most commonly missed the social interaction that attendance at church presents, but many had appreciated the online activities that the parish had offered.

Overall, survey respondents were very likely to recommend their parish to others.