

Called to Bear Fruit

REPORT ON THE CONSULTATION
2025



ARCHDIOCESE *of*
SOUTHWARK



Report in 60 seconds

Thousands of parishioners across the Archdiocese took part in the Called to Bear Fruit consultation, offering honest, hopeful and practical reflections on the life and mission of our Church in Southwark. People spoke with gratitude for their parish communities, where welcome, prayer and sacramental preparation are often sources of real strength, while also expressing a desire for deeper formation and ongoing opportunities to grow in faith. It is clear there is a profound love of the Lord Jesus in our parishes, along with a burning desire to lead people to him. That is why it was so heartening to see a strong recognition that evangelisation is central to parish life, though many asked for clarity and practical tools to help move from words to action.

Youth emerged as the most urgent priority, with a widespread call to invest in engaging and supporting young people at the heart of our mission. Across the board, parishioners highlighted the real need for collaboration - with neighbouring parishes, with clergy and among volunteers - as well as the need to value and invite new people to share their gifts. Looking ahead, people acknowledged the reality of fewer priests, but also expressed confidence that laity and clergy together can take up the challenge of renewal. The consultation revealed a Church that cares deeply for its future, ready to grow in faith, hope and love, and eager to continue to build vibrant parish communities that witness joyfully to the Gospel.

15 action points have been identified from the themes:

1. Celebrate existing signs of growth
2. Provide a new vision and a study guide on the purpose of a parish
3. Encourage inter-parish collaboration
4. Give clarity about what mission looks like today
5. Encourage parishes to move from welcome to invitation
6. Share good practice from across the Archdiocese
7. Celebrate and equip catechists and parents
8. Build on the foundation of sacramental preparation by offering ongoing formation
9. Promote resources on prayer
10. Strengthen our culture of hospitality
11. Celebrate and thank volunteers more visibly
12. Encourage personal invitations into service
13. Invest in youth ministry
14. Launch a Parish Renewal Course for laity and clergy
15. Pray for renewal



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JOHN WILSON



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Archdiocesan Jubilee Celebration 2025



Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Your time, your prayer and your reflections are a wonderful sign of the faith and commitment to the Lord Jesus alive in our communities. Thank you for sharing so openly your hopes for the life of His Church in our Archdiocese.

The consultation marks the fourth phase of the Called to Bear Fruit project. Following periods of discernment, learning and listening to the clergy of our Archdiocese, it was imperative that we heard the voices of the lay faithful. Thousands of contributions from across our parishes have offered insights into how we can grow as missionary disciples of Christ. This has been a moment of grace, reminding us that the Holy Spirit continues to guide and animate the Church in Southwark.

I am deeply grateful to our priests and deacons whose pastoral leadership made this process possible, and to the lay faithful for your enthusiasm and love for the Church. My thanks also go to Fr Stephen Langridge and Georgia Clarke for facilitating this process and producing such an encouraging report.

Called to Bear Fruit has been a consultation in the Synodal spirit, demonstrating our Archdiocese's commitment to journeying on the way together to the Lord Jesus Himself, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Building on this Synodal momentum has ensured we have maintained a direct focus on Christ so that all can encounter Him, so that all can say yes to Him.

While we face challenges — changing demographics, fewer clergy and the need to adapt to new realities — your reflections reveal a people filled with hope, willing to serve and eager to see the Gospel take root afresh. Most importantly, you revealed a burning desire to encounter the Lord Jesus and help others to encounter Him so that their lives can be transformed too.

Together, we have identified great opportunities for collaboration, growth and renewal, especially through deeper faith formation, stronger community life, vibrant worship and outreach that reflects Christ's mercy and love.

As we move forward, several priorities are clear. We will continue to invest in our growing Southwark Youth Service, forming young people as missionary disciples. We will strengthen inter-parish collaboration across ministries and plan together how groupings of parishes might best serve our communities. We will also renew our Archdiocesan and parish structures so that the energy and creativity shown throughout this consultation can bear lasting fruit.

Fifteen action points have been identified as immediate next steps, forming the foundation for our next phase of renewal. Among these is a study guide to Pope Francis' instruction *The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community*, helping us reflect on what it means to be a missionary parish today. I encourage you to use this resource in your small groups, homes and parishes, praying for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we reflect on how He is leading us. As an Archdiocese, we will continue to discern the process of renewal and further updates will be provided in due course.

Our task is not simply to change structures but to renew hearts, allowing Christ to draw us closer to Himself so that our parishes and Archdiocese become radiant with His presence. Our duty as Catholics is to be evangelising disciples, who are called to help those in our communities to encounter the Lord Jesus. But this also means we need to encounter the Lord Jesus in our own lives too, especially in the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance. It is by placing this encounter with Christ at the centre of our lives and at the centre of our parishes that we will bear much fruit.

So together, with faith and confidence, let's build up the Body of Christ in Southwark, becoming ever more a community of missionary disciples filled with joy and hope for the future.

With every blessing and assurance of my prayers,

+ 

+ John Wilson
Archbishop of Southwark





Called to Bear Fruit

As a response to the Called to Bear Fruit consultation:

- 123 parishes submitted responses.
- All 20 deaneries are represented.
- 1,418 submissions in total.
- Total participants: approx. 2,800 people.

About

Called to Bear Fruit is a process of renewal which seeks to ensure that all parishes in the Archdiocese of Southwark are equipped with the vision, leadership, resources and infrastructure needed to enable them to become growing communities that evangelise, form disciples and inspire witness.

The initiative represents the Archdiocese's commitment to a Spirit-led process of renewal—one rooted in prayer, discernment and honest listening. It is grounded in the conviction that every parish is called to be a vibrant community of missionary disciples, bearing fruit in the areas of evangelisation, discipleship and service.

This current synthesis emerges from the fourth phase of the process: a lay consultation designed to gather insights from parishioners and lay leaders across the Archdiocese.

The lay consultation builds on several foundational steps that have already taken place:

1) Clergy Days

These gatherings brought together priests and deacons from across the Archdiocese to reflect on challenges and opportunities facing our parishes. They provided a space to deepen the shared understanding of what parish renewal could look like.

2) Gallup Survey

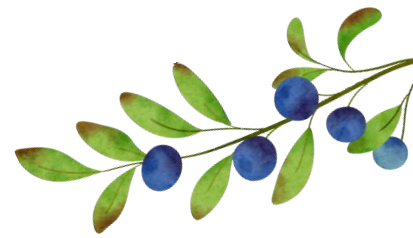
Commissioned by the Archdiocese, this survey measured clergy wellbeing and engagement, using a globally recognised tool. The results have helped to shape ongoing support for clergy and to surface systemic issues that affect leadership and morale.

3) Deanery Level Consultations

Building on the Clergy Days, localised deanery meetings were held to hear from clergy in smaller groups. These sessions allowed for conversation around three themes of clergy wellbeing, pastoral provision and implementing change.

4) Lay Consultation (this phase)

This current phase sought to listen directly to the laity: to understand how parishioners are experiencing parish life, where they see signs of growth, and where they sense barriers to renewal. It was an opportunity for thousands of people from across the Archdiocese to reflect prayerfully and honestly on what is bearing fruit—and what is not.



Contributors

There are 175 parishes in the Archdiocese of Southwark and 20 deaneries. We received responses from 123 parishes covering all 20 deaneries. Kingston deanery had 100% response rate from its parishes, and the majority of deaneries had over 60% response rate. The graph in image 1.0 below shows the percentage of parishes represented by deanery. We can be confident that with the number of respondents, over 2,800 people, the responses give a significant representation of the Archdiocese.

N.B. Quotations from the survey responses are given throughout this report, with the response number given in [1234] brackets.

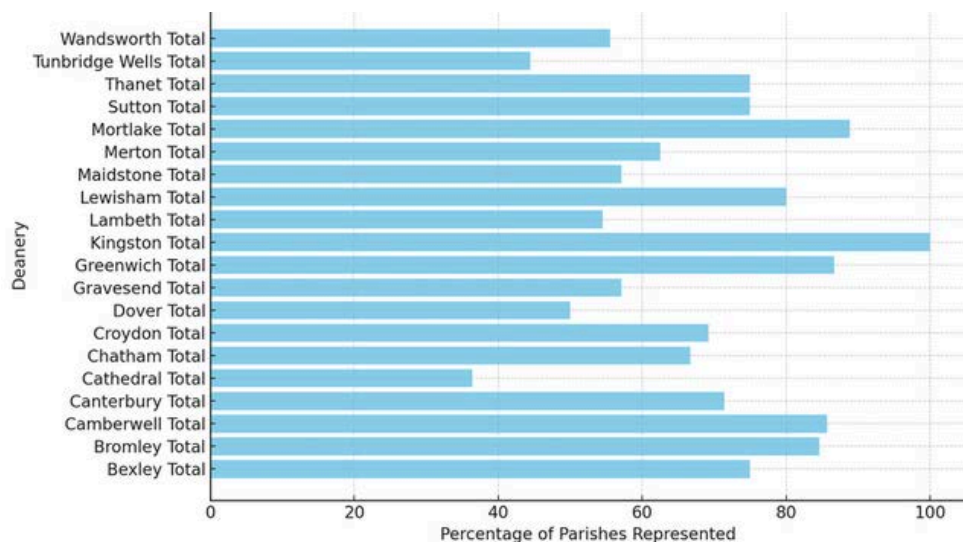
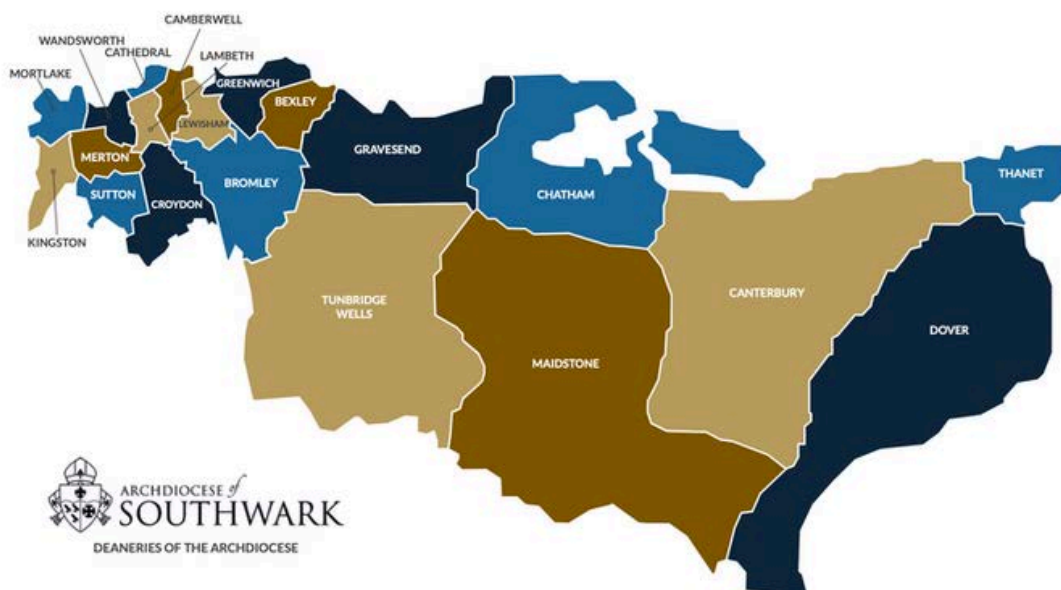


Image 1.0 Percentage of Parishes Represented per Deanery



Summary of Theme One: Taking Stock

About

The first theme of the consultation addressed the current situation of our Archdiocese, as it is perceived by the parishioners who attend their local parish and contribute to its flourishing. It asked whether parishes were growing, declining or staying the same. It also asked groups to reflect on where they hope their parish will be in ten years' time. In order to know where one is going, it's important first of all to know from where one is starting. Only from there can we map the journey ahead.

Summary

Responses to this theme express a strong sense of **hope** and a **clear openness** to both receiving from and offering support to other parishes. While some acknowledge a decline in church attendance, others highlight that growth can take many forms – such as greater faithfulness, vibrancy, friendliness among parishioners, improved music, reverence at Mass and investment in ministries that they trust will bear fruit in the future.

1) How is your parish doing? Is it growing, declining or staying the same?

41% of responses note that they feel their parish is growing, while **23%** report that it is declining and **11%** say that it is staying the same. The rest of the responses, 25%, couldn't comment due to lack of data available (9%) or because the trends were unclear.

The effect of Covid-19 is acutely felt across the Archdiocese, with many reporting that numbers fell starkly due to the pandemic, but have been rising steadily since.

2) Where do we expect our parish to be in ten years time? Where do we hope to be?

People are undeniably hopeful, expressing deep care for their local parish. **80%** of respondents look to the future with hope, 17% of which acknowledge that a flourishing future depends on taking concrete action now. Only **14%** express despondency about the future of their parish. The remaining responses were unclear on the future.

3) How open are we to receiving support from other parishes and what support do we need?

Encouragingly, **87%** of groups say they are open to both receiving from and offering support to other parishes, yet, in many of the written responses, people admit that there is currently little or no connection with neighbouring parishes. Those involved in *Some Definite Service* – a diocesan wide approach to encouraging and supporting parish growth through intentional prayer resources, a network of volunteer accompaniers and resources for parish planning – as Parish Leads or Deanery Mentors are grateful for the opportunities to meet with others locally and to develop their network.

“We identified two local parishes which may be able to help. Skill sharing would be a great asset to our parish.” [349]

Insights from Theme One: Taking Stock



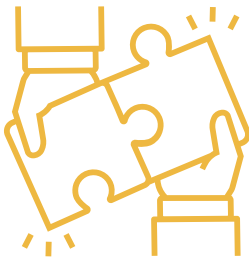
Hopeful:

Respondents are both realistic and hopeful: while they recognise the challenges, they believe renewal is possible. Many share excellent ideas and concrete examples for revitalising parish life, often including personal reflections on how they themselves can take responsibility for reaching out - both within their parish community and beyond. There is also a strong desire to learn from best practice and to discover how to put it into action locally.



Desire for richer vision of parish life:

Parishioners note that growth consists not only in numbers at Mass, but also faithfulness, vibrancy, welcome, reverence and investment in ministries. There is a sense that a shift is needed in people's understanding of what it means to be a 'parish' and how to respond to the needs of today.



Desire for collaboration :

There is a clear desire in the majority of responses to both receive from and offer support to other parishes. Some feel this needs to be organic and not decided by Archdiocesan organisation. Mostly, people want to know what is happening locally and to advertise and/or collaborate.

"It was noted that moving forward, it would be beneficial to gather data on parishioners living in these areas through the school and church. Some individuals generously offered their time to collect and transport anyone from these areas who wishes to attend Mass but faces transportation difficulties."

[1078]

"We are very open to changing this and working with other parishes, but we need to recognise what the starting point is... It would be beneficial to know key contacts in our neighbouring deanery, share information and look at ways of supporting each other through any challenges."

[505]

Next steps from Theme One: Taking Stock

1 Celebrate existing signs of growth

The Archdiocese will share stories of parishes that are working towards renewal, highlighting examples of best practice and celebrating what God is doing across our Church in Southwark. If you've not seen yet, look at our Archdiocesan communications pages:

News: www.rcaos.org.uk/news

Social Media:



www.facebook.com/ArchdioceseOfSouthwark



www.instagram.com/rcsouthwark



www.youtube.com/@RCSouthwark1



Follow the Archdiocese of Southwark channel on WhatsApp:
www.rcaos.org.uk/whatsapp

2 Share new *vision statement* and a study guide on the purpose of a parish

A new **vision statement** for the Archdiocese will be issued by the Archbishop. In addition, a study guide on Pope Francis' instruction on the purpose of a parish will be made available to parishes in order to clarify and reaffirm our current mission.

3 Encourage inter-parish collaboration

Missional collaboration across parishes will continue to be actively encouraged. Especially in the areas of evangelisation, outreach, youth, music and public witness of the faith. *For example:*

- Sharing details of local Alpha/Sycamore/Bible Study courses and encouraging flourishing parishes to offer training locally
- Promoting Corpus Christi processions
- Sharing youth events, retreats and training
- Encouraging outreach to the elderly and isolated
- Sharing details of local church concerts
- Promoting the role of deanery mentors who accompany and connect parish leads



Summary of Theme Two: Proclaiming the Word

About

Reflecting on the Great Commission in Matthew 28, this theme explored the primary purpose of our parishes: to evangelise. Groups were invited to consider how we are living out, and how we might renew, our missionary commitment.

To evangelise is to proclaim the Good News: to go out, to share God's love and to invite others into relationship with Him. While our parishes rightly care for the Catholic community within them, the consultation revealed a strong awareness that we must not lose sight of our wider mission: to 'Go and make disciples of all nations'.

22% describe their parish as welcoming but struggle to name any other missionary activity.

6% say evangelisation is spoken about, usually in homilies, but little action follows.

8% list many different parish activities (e.g. reconciliation services, socials, RCIA) which serve the existing community, but no specific outreach that brings other people in.

The rest of the responses are unclear or unsure what 'missionary' means in practice.

2) What does our parish do to reach new people?

Parishes shared a wide range of missionary efforts: delivering prayer cards and leaflets, street missions, 'Sparks of Light'/Nightfever, carol services, social events, courses such as Alpha, Sycamore and Discovering Christ, outreach through the Neocatechumenal Way, opening cafés and visiting the lonely or housebound.

"(The) Discovery Programme could be used for the catechists to start with and then expanded to others."
[1216]

2) Are there local parishes which we could team up with to reach new people?

As before, there is openness from the majority of responses to collaboration. Most people in the responses are able to identify parishes to team up with and good ideas from elsewhere to develop.

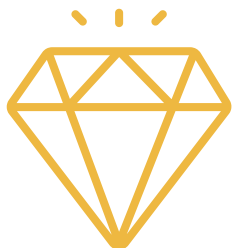
Summary

1) How missionary is our parish?

People offer a wide variety of answers to this question. Some speak about sharing faith with those outside the Church, while many describe things like offering a warm welcome, helping others or building up parish life. Others say they aren't sure what mission really means in the context of a parish. Together, these answers show the ways people already strive to live the Church's mission and also a real desire to understand more clearly what missionary activity means for us today.

Almost a quarter, **23%**, of groups feel that their parish is, on the whole, a missionary parish. However, a larger percentage, **31%**, report that their parish is not at all missionary.

Insights from Theme Two: Proclaiming the Word



Clarity:

Parishioners describe evangelisation in various ways, such as proclaiming the Gospel, welcoming newcomers, serving others or strengthening parish life. This diversity shows the breadth of commitment already present, but also a desire for clearer teaching and tools about what evangelisation means in a parish setting. This is particularly true concerning the role of lay people and the role of the clergy.



Desire to be equipped:

Some responses show a real desire to be missionary, while others admit they lack confidence in sharing their faith. Many parishes describe themselves as welcoming, but recognise the challenge of turning welcome into active outreach. Where evangelisation is spoken about, people want support in moving from words to action. A number of groups say they are unfamiliar with tools such as Alpha or Sycamore, while others report running these courses successfully - highlighting the value of sharing good experiences across parishes.

“Our excellent parish priests speak frequently about evangelisation and the importance of spreading the word. In terms of what we do as a parish we feel that parishioners maybe would look to be more involved in missionary work but do not know how to do this. We think the parish should have a strategy, a road map, to explain what is required to deliver Mission.” [166]

“Evidence in Parish Evangelisation Cells, Parish Priest, Journey in Faith, Alpha, Emmaus Retreats, Bereavement Group, Eucharistic Ministers for housebound, Life in the Spirit seminars, Youth ministry, Primary School and Convent. Adult receptions. Evangelisation spoken about all the time.” [1262]

Next steps from Theme Two: *Proclaiming the Word*

4

Give clarity about what *mission* looks like today

The key way in which training is given, collaboration expressed and information shared is the diocesan-wide approach *Some Definite Service* - which is unique to Southwark. Information on training and resources are available via their website: aec.rcaos.org.uk/sds

The Archdiocesan Advisor for Evangelisation and Outreach can be contacted here:

Contact: evangelisation@rcaos.org.uk

The next 'Evangelisation Expo' will be in Spring 2026.

5

Encourage parishes to move from *welcome* to *invitation*

Support parishes in developing simple, intentional ways to invite newcomers and the lapsed e.g. personal invitations, open days, follow-up after sacramental preparation, concerts. An effort will be made to create a culture of invitation across the whole Archdiocese. The Archdiocesan Agency for Evangelisation and Catechesis **Mission Deck**, 48 cards designed to serve as an aid for evangelists, is available for purchase now via their website.

6

Share *good practice* from across the Archdiocese

Spotlight initiatives which are bearing fruit in parishes and provide contact details for people to follow-up with any questions on how to get started in their own local area. *Some Definite Service* provides a stimulus for such sharing. Examples include:

- The Parish Evangelisation Cell model
- How to run an Alpha course
- New Parishioner Events
- Bible Studies
- Street missions



Summary of Theme Three: Living Discipleship (Faith)

About

In order for anyone to be an effective missionary of Jesus Christ, they must first be His disciple. This third theme looked at how our parishes are nurturing opportunities to grow in faith, especially through our sacramental life and preparation. The questions encouraged groups to consider how their parish engages with young people to help them to become life-long disciples, especially in the contact we have with them during their preparation for the sacraments.

Summary

1) What opportunities are there for adults to grow in the faith? What do we offer for older teenagers and young adults?

Many parishes report some form of adult formation: RCIA, Bible Study groups, talks, retreats, pilgrimages and devotions, however, it is often noted that provision is inconsistent and sometimes not well resourced. **Over 90%** of groups acknowledge that there is something available in their parish for growing in faith.

The four most common activities listed were: **Bible Studies, talks, youth groups, and RCIA.** Other opportunities include *Life in the Spirit* seminars, retreats, prayer such as Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and the rosary, Women's and Men's groups and musical opportunities. Where sacramental preparation involves parents and the whole family, this approach is welcomed and praised.

2) What does sacramental preparation look like in our parish?

Baptism, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation programmes are usually run with dedication and commitment. Parents and catechists are often praised in the responses and many highlight sacramental preparation as one of the strongest areas of parish life. Several note that after sacraments are received, a number of families or individuals often step back from parish life. There is a clear desire expressed to **move from preparation to ongoing formation.** People share their desire for follow-up opportunities that keep people engaged and help them continue growing in faith, however the lack of volunteers is recognised as a barrier.

“We have a good sacramental preparation programme and some follow-up to try to retain the involvement of our young people post-confirmation. We see our youth group as key, and recent signs of growing participation are encouraging.” [507]

3) Where have we witnessed sacramental preparation done well?

A few people see potential in learning from neighbouring parishes' models of preparation, whereas others express concern about possible difficulties and whether larger-scale collaboration would be suitable for their children.

“We simply have no knowledge from which to identify local parishes with which to work. This was an eye opener and possibly a missed opportunity as there could be ideas we could swap.” [507]

Insights from Theme Three: Living Discipleship (Faith)



Family Centred Formation:

Sacramental preparation and ongoing formation is most fruitful when it involves the whole family. Parents value taking part in their children's catechesis and often grow in faith themselves, while marriage preparation, when done well, is especially appreciated. Where parishes are effectively forming the whole family, parishes tend to see higher rates of retention.



Need for a 'next step':

Many respondents express a desire for follow-up opportunities after the sacraments, so that families and individuals remain engaged and continue to grow in faith. There is a need for a "next step" mentality, meaning, what is the next step for this person, this family or this group once this programme has finished?



Pipelines:

Very often the excellent formation which is offered is one-off and can end up relying on the same individuals to make it happen. Pipelines are needed to focus what is offered and ensure people are encouraged back into volunteering and ministry themselves. For example:

New parishioner joins → Invited to Sycamore → Joins a weekly Bible study → Invited to volunteer at next Sycamore.

"Courses are run for First Holy Communion and for Confirmation preparation, and engaged couples are provided with preparation before marriage. Parents of children being Confirmed are required to attend talks on the Faith. The above courses are done well in this Parish and are much appreciated and valued by attendees." [250]

"Including parents in the preparation for the sacraments is very helpful to extend the learning beyond just the children and reinforce the active faith of the whole family." [719]

"We have used Sycamore courses for the parents of Confirmation children." [1146]

Next steps from Theme Three: Living Discipleship (Faith)

7

Celebrate and equip catechists and parents

Regularly acknowledge catechists and parents publicly at Mass and/or in the parish newsletter. Help families to feel at home in the parish by making a special effort to welcome them. Celebrate the catechists by regularly highlighting their good work and asking for more volunteers to join them (e.g. once per term).

The *Agency for Evangelisation and Catechesis* hosts an annual “Day for Catechists”, with excellent talks and training for those who serve in this way. Parents can also be equipped to strengthen the faith life at home by introducing simple ways to involve them during their child’s sacramental preparation e.g. a short talk or testimony with tea and coffee.

Find out more about marriage preparation and family support from the *Marriage and Family Life* team in the Archdiocese: www.rcsouthwark.co.uk/mission/marriage-and-family-life

Furthermore, the *Agency for Evangelisation and Catechesis* has an **Advisor for Catechesis** who can be contacted here:

Contact: catechesis@rcaos.org.uk

8

Build on the foundation of sacramental preparation by offering ongoing formation

While it can be difficult to arrange constant ongoing formation at parish level due to the availability of resources, the Archdiocese has been investing in various initiatives to help support and equip parishes to provide a follow-up for individuals and families following reception of the sacraments. There is the **Archbishop’s Certificate** and the **Catholic Certificate for Religious Studies** for those who want more formation.

Training, youth days, and youth retreats are available throughout the year from the **Southwark Catholic Youth Service**. A partnership with **The Ascent** has been made to support young people following Confirmation to continue investing in their faith, by subsidising places for young people in school Years 10-12.

The *Agency for Evangelisation and Catechesis* also has a **Formation Team**, who work to form communities of missionary disciples.

Contact: formation@rcaos.org.uk



Summary of Theme Four: Living Discipleship (Prayer and Community Life)

About

Theme Four addressed the prayer and community life of our Archdiocese, which is the 'engine' of our life and mission. As much as we are learning to become "schools of prayer", as Pope St John Paul II put it, then we are learning to become Jesus' disciples. Nothing is truly possible or lasting without prayer. As St Teresa of Calcutta once said,

"If we neglect prayer and if the branch is not connected with the vine, it will die. That connecting of the branch to the vine is prayer. If that connection is there then love is there, then joy is there, and we will be the sunshine of God's love..."

Summary

1) How are people taught to pray in our parish?

Intentional teaching on prayer is often limited, with most people learning at home, as children through sacramental preparation or simply by experience. Some parishes do offer talks, rosary groups, instruction through homilies or devotional practices. There is a sense that adults especially would like to receive more formation in prayer.

"There are no sessions available to teach people how to pray in the parish. This could be because there is an assumption that people already know how to pray." [1255]

2) Is regular Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament available in our area? Where? How available is the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

Most parishes do offer Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and regular opportunities for Reconciliation, however availability and times vary. In some cases, Adoration is daily, while in others it is rare or at times when working professionals cannot attend. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is more consistently available and, while some feel it could be promoted more, others comment on how generous their priests are in making themselves available for confession when asked.

"Confession is on everyday in the morning but it would be good if different parishes could stagger confession times and make it more suitable for people who are working." [758]

3) Imagine visiting our parish for the first time. What would the experience of Sunday Mass be like for you?

An impressive **83%** of groups said a first-time visit to their parish would be **positive**. Most parishes highlight the importance of welcome and hospitality, with around **two-thirds** describing practices such as greeters, coffee after Mass or dedicated welcome teams.

Many note that different Masses have distinct focuses (music, families, quiet, teens), though these are not always advertised. Training for welcoming teams is noted as necessary and appreciated.

Key Insights of Theme Four: Living Discipleship (Prayer and Community Life)



Teaching and resources on prayer needed

There is widespread acknowledgement that people are encouraged to pray and there are many opportunities to pray collectively, including at Mass, stations of the cross and saying the rosary. However, there is limited teaching on *how* and *why* we pray, which are resources that would be welcome.



Hospitality going well and can be strengthened

Welcoming teams are praised where they exist, but respondents also highlight the importance of training and support to make these ministries more effective. Identifying new people and giving a genuine welcome are key aspects of having hospitality teams.



Announcements and advertising

Many parishes provide regular times, sometimes daily, for Adoration and Reconciliation. However, access and timing vary, and some groups say that they aren't sure what is on or available in their own parish. The parish website, for example, can be described as the parish's new 'front door'. Is it easily accessible? Can people find up-to-date information there?

"The Eucharist is the main focus in our parish. Prayer leads to the creation of community life and a community that celebrates God present in their midst. There is a need to widen people's experience of prayer and thus deepen their understanding of Eucharist and all the Sacraments." [607]

"The Mass is very welcoming. The hymns are always well-prepared. The church is beautifully decorated. The priests are always very welcoming, especially with children." [1281]

"We think the parish would be welcoming and friendly but there would be no way of individuals knowing that someone was 'new'." [626]

Next steps from Theme Four: Living Discipleship (Prayer and Community Life)

9

Promote resources on prayer

There are lots of excellent resources on prayer available today. The *Archdiocese of Southwark Spirituality Commission* offers information and resources on ways into prayer via its website: www.southwarkdsc.org.uk

Smartphone apps have become increasingly popular, such as *Universalis*, *Hallow* and *Pray As You Go*. *Christian Art* offers a daily Gospel reading and art reflection.

The *Southwark Archdiocese Rosary Prayer Project* encourages prayer for vocations and all of our priests, join here: bit.ly/southwarkrosary.

There are also prayer courses available which can be developed for parishes or deaneries to run in order to invite their parishioners into a deeper relationship with God through prayer.

The Archdiocese will signpost these resources to parishes as well as to the clergy. The **need** for prayer must also be articulated often and with love.

10

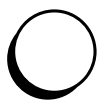
Strengthen our culture of hospitality

Hospitality is one of the simplest and most powerful ways we share God's love. A warm smile at the door, coffee after Mass or introducing a newcomer to others can make all the difference. Many parishes already do this well, and we can build on these strengths by making welcome more visible and intentional, so that every person who comes through our doors feels they belong. Below are some key principles to strengthening a culture of hospitality:



BE WARM AND PERSONAL

A smile, eye contact and a friendly word make people feel seen and valued. Treat it as if you were welcoming someone into your home.



FOLLOW UP WITH CARE

Noticing new faces, remembering names and inviting people to future events encourages them to return and get involved.



MAKE HOSPITALITY A SHARED CULTURE

Hospitality isn't just the role of one 'team' — the whole parish community is called to make each other feel at home.



Summary of Theme Five: The Witness of Charity

About

From the earliest days of the Church, Christians have been recognised by their love. In Acts 2 we read how the first disciples shared what they had so that no one was in need. Pope Francis reminds us that this same witness of charity is at the heart of every parish today: a community called to serve the poor, the vulnerable and the wider society with concrete acts of love. This theme invited people to reflect on how our parishes live out that mission of charity, both within the Church family and in the local community.

Summary

1) Who are those in need in our local community?

Nearly every parish group identified people in need, with the most frequently mentioned needs being: homelessness (40%), elderly (38%), lonely/isolated (28%), poor/financial hardship (22%) and the sick (20%). Please note that responses could mention more than one group.

Less frequent but significant mentions include: refugees, migrants, youth, families and those struggling with addiction. The responses show a broad awareness of local needs, with strong emphasis on homelessness, isolation and support for the elderly.

“The sick, the elderly and the homeless. Volunteers see to the needs of these groups. A list of the sick is also held in the parish and volunteers check on them.” [286]

2) Do we have enough volunteers in our parish? How do we recruit new volunteers?

62% of responses indicate that they **do not** have enough volunteers. **24%** said that, yes, they do have enough volunteers and **14%** were unclear or unsure if the parish had enough support. Often, people note that the same people tend to do a lot and it was rarely communicated if more help was needed.

“The same people seem to do everything. The group were unsure whether more volunteers were needed as the needs were not communicated as widely as they could be.” [426]

Many comments also mention an ageing volunteer base and difficulty recruiting younger people. There is gratitude for dedicated volunteers, but concern about sustainability. Where parishes have made a special effort to celebrate and thank their volunteers, such as preparing a meal for them or hosting a ‘Parish Volunteer Day’, this was greatly appreciated.

3) Are there local parishes we could work with to make our outreach efforts more effective?

The majority of responses indicate openness to cooperation, but with hesitancy about practicalities or losing parish identity. People feel that outreach could be effective across denominations as well as between Catholic parishes. Further, people identified agencies for helpful partnerships such as Caritas and SVP.

Caritas Southwark can be found via this website: caritas.rcaos.org.uk

Key Insights of Theme Five: The Witness of Charity



Awareness

Parishes recognise the many faces of need in their communities, from the elderly, lonely and housebound, to refugees, asylum seekers, the homeless, families in financial hardship and young people facing challenges. Even in relatively affluent areas, people note “pockets of real need”. This shows a strong attentiveness to the realities around people.



Volunteers are valued but overstretched

Welcoming teams were praised where they exist, but respondents also highlight the importance of training and support to make these ministries more effective. Identifying new people and giving a genuine welcome are key aspects of having hospitality teams.



Openness to collaboration, but confidence is mixed

Some parishes are already working with neighbours or local Christian communities in food banks, choirs and outreach projects and many are positive about further opportunities. Others are less sure how collaboration could work, or prefer linking with charities and community groups instead. This suggests fertile ground for building a stronger culture of partnership, but also a need for practical guidance and coordination.

“A relatively small group of committed individuals continues to shoulder most of the responsibilities, from organizing events to maintaining parish services. While their dedication is deeply appreciated, relying on the same group for every task is not sustainable in the long term and limits the potential for wider community engagement.” [1179]

“The Priest and the Parish Council run a campaign on ‘Time, Talent, and Treasure’ with the view to encourage parishioners to take up responsibilities and serve others.” [700]

“Key lesson learnt: Need to use people’s personal/ business skills more.” [1081]

Next steps from Theme Five: The Witness of Charity

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Celebrate and thank volunteers more visibly

Many parishes hold small events or meals to thank their volunteers, and these are warmly received. The Archdiocese encourages every parish to host a simple “Volunteer Thanksgiving Sunday” once a year, with a blessing at Mass and a shared coffee or meal afterwards. This aims to celebrate and honour the good work people have given to their local church and might inspire others to join their ministries.

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Encourage personal invitations into service

Personal invitation matters. Many people don’t step forward because they feel unsure or unworthy, yet when encouraged, they often discover new gifts and a deeper relationship with God through their service. Inviting someone into a small act of volunteering is not only a help to the parish, it can also be the very way God draws them closer to himself.

If you are already active in your parish, one way to approach recruiting volunteers is to follow these four steps:

1. Pray

Ask the Lord to reveal someone in the parish who might be open to an invitation to serve.

2. Explain the **vision not the task**

Instead of “We need someone to serve coffee,” try: “Would you help us create a space where people feel welcome and get to know one another after Mass?”

3. Personalise the invitation

Don’t rely only on newsletter notices. A quiet, friendly conversation, for example, “*I think you’d be great at this, would you consider it?*”, is the most effective. Also, reassure people they will have support.

4. Keep it **small and **simple****

Offer a ‘first step’ (e.g. trying something once a month) and don’t overwhelm someone who is coming for the first time. Equally, try to give them a meaningful role, so they know their help is making a difference.



Summary of Theme Six: Proposals for Revitalisation

About

This final theme invited people to look forward with faith and courageous boldness, offering proposals for how our parishes and Archdiocese might be renewed for mission into the future. Groups reflected on their parish priorities for the next five years. They identified other parishes to collaborate with to achieve their vision. They also discussed how parish life could adapt if priests were shared, as 41% of our priests reach retirement age by the end of 2025. The reflection prompted honest and heartfelt responses, highlighting the deep care people have for their local parish and clergy.

Summary

1) What should our parish priorities be for the next five years?

Responses show a strong desire for growth in numbers, faithfulness, and participation. The single most repeated theme was **youth ministry**: 57% of groups highlight reaching and engaging young people as one of their top priorities.

Alongside this, parishes call for renewed focus on evangelisation, stronger parishioner engagement, support for clergy, lay leadership and deeper formation in faith and prayer. While the emphases differed, there is a clear sense of urgency and hope for revitalisation.

2) Are there local parishes we could work with to make our efforts more effective?

Most groups express openness to collaboration with neighbouring parishes, especially where resources could be shared or ministries combined. Some mention existing cooperation (such as shared youth activities, choirs or social outreach), while others admit uncertainty about how collaboration would work in practice. A recurring concern is maintaining parish identity, but the overall tone of responses suggests willingness to work together if it helps mission flourish.

“Collaboration is always a wonderful way to grow and improve, and working with other parishes has been so rewarding. Sharing ideas, resources and best practices can really open up new possibilities for all of us.” [1313]

3) If we had to share a priest with another parish what would we need to change?

This question prompted noticeable concern for many groups. People recognise the need for greater lay involvement in leadership, administration and pastoral care. People express worry for priests' wellbeing if stretched too thin, and several call for training and support to help laity share responsibility. While some fear the loss of community identity, others see this as an opportunity to strengthen collaboration between parishes and to deepen understanding of their shared baptismal mission.

Out of remit: Some people raised issues regarding doctrinal/disciplinary questions which are not in the remit of this consultation.

Key Insights of Theme Six: Proposals for Revitalisation



Youth is the standout priority

Across the Archdiocese, the renewal of youth ministry is named more than any other area of parish life, with 57% of groups highlighting it as essential. This reflects both concern for the future and real hope that young people will be central in the revitalisation of our Church.



Growth is desired in many forms

People want parishes to grow, not only in numbers, but also in engagement, prayer and service. Evangelisation, lay formation and deepening parishioner involvement are consistently highlighted as central to renewal.



Co-responsibility between clergy and laity recognised as essential

Parishioners recognise the need for lay people to take a more prominent role in leadership and pastoral care to support priests in this work. The role of deacons and of women is highlighted in the responses, noting the importance of recognising the faithful members of our congregations who give so much to the life of the Church. The possibility of employing individuals to support the mission is highly encouraged and seen as valuing the work of our parishes.

“Our parish is extremely active in evangelisation...our parish priest welcomes, encourages and initiates many activities to this end. However, we wish, hope and pray that the whole Diocese could be encouraged in this way, and that the number of vocations will increase!” [253]

*“Greater involvement of lay people in the management of the parish is a shared responsibility.
More connection with the social fabric of the neighbourhood.
More training in shared leadership.” [1284]*

Next steps from Theme Six: Proposals for Revitalisation

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Invest in youth ministry

The Archdiocese has been investing greatly in the *Southwark Catholic Youth Service*. There are activities for those under-18, young adults, as well as a 'mission team' who volunteer to provide Saturday parish retreat days for youth and Confirmation groups in our parishes. The *Southwark Catholic Youth Service* also provides training throughout the year for those interested in/serving in youth ministry:

www.rcsouthwark.co.uk/mission/southwark-catholic-youth-service/

Contact: youth@rcaos.org.uk

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Launch a Parish Renewal Course for laity and clergy

Accessible training both for clergy and parishioners covering areas of vision, evangelisation, youth engagement, collaboration between parishes, management and leadership. This is already in the pipeline and the launch will be in 2026.

Meanwhile, *Some Definite Service* will continue to see the appointment of deanery mentors and parish leads in evangelisation, catechesis and formation, building up a culture of intentional accompaniment in our parishes and deaneries to enable their growth.

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A call to prayer for renewal

Archbishop John would like to invite everyone into a time of deeper prayer and personal renewal, by committing to one or more of the following for the intention of renewal in the Archdiocese:

1. A Holy Hour before the Blessed Sacrament
2. Praying the rosary
3. Seeking the Lord's mercy through the Sacrament of Reconciliation

My hope is for our parishes to be places of profound **joy and healing**, where lay men and women experience the **transformative love of Christ**; where they are equipped to carry forward the Church's **mission** with renewed purpose.

Archbishop John Wilson

With the **light and the strength** of the Holy Spirit, let us build a Church **founded on God's love**, a **sign of unity**, a **missionary Church** that opens its arms to the world, **proclaims the word**, allows itself to be made "restless" by history, and becomes **a leaven of harmony** for humanity.

Pope Leo XIV

**Called to
Bear Fruit**

