



Our Lady of the Angels Catholic Church

Report from Consultation on the Future of Rushcliffe Parishes, July-September 2025

About this report

The responses to the questionnaire circulated in July and early August were full of heartfelt concern for the future of our Catholic communities. People replied with care and with a desire to sustain their Catholic faith lived in our five local communities. This report cannot include everything that was said. Altogether there were 406 responses which gave us over 8,400 comments, some brief, some much longer. So we apologise if anything you consider crucial has been left out.

The report does not follow the questions. Rather, it presents the main messages that came out from all the responses taken together. Every response has been read in full by one of the volunteer team that analysed the responses. The appendix explains how we did this task and who was involved.

Many of the questions were about several possible options, as it is unclear yet whether the future might be one, two or three churches. This meant that people had to imagine how they would be affected or how the parish life and mission might be affected, without knowing what will actually happen. Many pointed out that their views about how they would respond and about challenges or benefits would depend on how many churches remain and where these are. So they express fears and concerns, as well as needs and hopes.

There is no easy answer in this report to the challenge we face, although some directions are indicated. It is a portrait of where we are now. There is a great deal of work still to be done.

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- 1 About closing churches.**
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## 1 About closing churches.

### People understand and accept the need for change.

- The majority of people recognise that change is going to happen, that it is inevitable. They understand the difficulties faced by priests trying to cover all the churches and communities. They know that we don't have enough priests to cover all the churches in the future. They understand that the present situation is unsustainable. 'It has to be done', one response said. For another, 'I am glad that the challenge is being embraced'. There is acceptance of the need to respond to changing circumstances and rationalise resources.
- There is less consensus about the church capacity needed going forward and whether closure of church buildings is the only option. People are unsure about whether practice is declining or not, as churches are well attended. They want to have up to date statistics and demographic information.

### Attitudes towards the prospect of closing churches are mixed, and mostly fearful.

- **Around a quarter of the responses expressed a positive acceptance of whatever change happens.** They still spoke of sadness, but also 'overall positivity'. For some, this was a faith statement; 'I have strong faith that the Holy Spirit will guide us to a better future'.
- **But a larger number – at least two thirds or perhaps three quarters – saw the impact of changes as bringing loss, sadness and diminishment.** They used words like 'disappointment', 'dismay' and 'shock'. They spoke of being 'absolutely devastated', 'heart-broken', 'gutted', 'angry and resentful'. Often these feelings related to a worry about the closure of their own church. Some communicate a sense of being disillusioned with the Catholic Church as a whole.
- These emotions came from very personal faith stories. People spoke about losing their family history in a particular church; about losing their hope to be buried from the church they had attended for a life-time; about losing the possibility that their children would make their first communion in the church in which they had made theirs. **The impact of closures is not just about convenience. It is about faith and Catholic identity and how these are woven into a community and a place.**
- Overall, many worried that the changes, whatever they are, will reduce mass attendance. They think – or fear – that people will simply stop coming. Many said this was likely to be the case for themselves and their families, mainly for practical reasons. Others think they – and others - will go elsewhere; to the Cathedral, to Our Lady and St Patrick's in the Meadows or Corpus Christi in Clifton, to the local Anglican church, or whichever other Christian church is closest and does not need travel. Some say they would switch to streaming Mass, although recognising this is far from ideal. One response said 'I know we could watch the Mass online but that doesn't make you part of the community'.
- Some thought that parish income would decrease as a consequence.

### The biggest loss would be of community and relationships.

The sadness and distress people expressed reflects the strong sense of community and relationships in all five church communities. A good number of responses spoke about how their faith is lived in and through our communities, where people feel known and where they find nourishment and confidence in their Catholic identity. They fear that if a church building closes, the community it gathers will die. 'How will we know who needs help if we don't know each other?' They do not want to lose the friendships that sustain their faith.

### Closely followed by the lack of a visible Catholic presence in each particular local community

- In the same breath, people also grieve about the prospect of any of the local communities no longer having a visible Catholic presence through a church building that is alive and used. There were

passionate defenders of each church having a mission in its own local community. Many noted the diocesan encouragement to be missionary and outgoing and could not reconcile this with closing, for example, Holy Spirit, a church in the heart of one of the wealthiest areas in the diocese.

- Some mentioned the impact on the wider Christian community in each area and the loss to strongly developed ecumenical relationships. This was particularly strong in responses from East Leake, Radcliffe and Keyworth but people from all five churches mentioned this. These bonds have been built up with care over many years and are expressed in joint activities such as World Day of Prayer, Lent groups, a bereavement group.

**No-one wants their own church to close; but many also take a larger view of our mission to the current borough of Rushcliffe; so they cannot believe that the diocese would close Holy Spirit Church.**

- A large number of the most impassioned responses strongly oppose closure of Holy Spirit. They see this as a 'catastrophic' prospect, an abdication of our mission and an 'irreversible loss'. 'Once we leave, we will never be able to return due to land prices and availability of space', one voice said. The church is, another said, 'an incredibly valuable precious asset'. For another, 'Holy Spirit Church represents the parish's best chance of growth and sustenance in one of the most family-friendly, densely populated, residential areas of Rushcliffe'.
- The fact that children and young people from the schools could walk to Holy Spirit was felt to be crucial.
- Many of these voices also said that no evidence had been given to justify the risk of closure or explain why it is too expensive to maintain or renovate Holy Spirit. They want to know the scale of repair and costs needed.
- They also felt that closing Holy Spirit would impact negatively on parish income; on people volunteering; on Christmas and Easter Mass attendance; on the groups that rely on the social centre, especially the cubs and scouts, but also activities like the Repair café, and the mothers and toddlers group, which serve the local community.

### **What other options could be possible?**

A significant number of responses wanted to know whether other options had been fully explored, and why some of these options had not been mentioned.

- Some of these were practical: would it make more sense to partner Holy Spirit with the churches in Clifton and the Meadows or with the Cathedral, and leave the four villages to be a separate parish? *(Although this crosses current Rushcliffe borough boundaries, these boundaries may disappear in the local government re-organisation)*. If these options have been ruled out, they would like to know why.
- Some were about alternative uses of the church buildings if it is no longer possible for our priests to celebrate Mass regularly in all of them.
- Many responses suggested retaining all the church buildings and holding Services of the Word with communion on Sundays as well as weekday prayer and social activities. If this would not be permitted by the Bishop, could he explain why?
- Some would also like to explore whether the church buildings could be used for community purposes.
- Some suggested use of other buildings in West Bridgford if Holy Spirit must close, to ensure a Mass is celebrated there and to maintain a local presence. Is there any building we could convert into a church?
- Others mentioned options relating to clergy; could we employ a regular supply priest? Or invite another priest from overseas to come?

## **2 About the idea of having one single church, whether new-built or by extending an existing one.**

### **Only a tiny number were positive about the prospect of building one church.**

There were only a handful of responses that were enthusiastic and in favour of a single church. A couple were excited at how a larger church could develop; others saw it as a pragmatic solution, if a suitable location could be found. Several spoke about what a new church should have; generous parking spaces, good social centre facilities, an up to date kitchen, a play area. Others thought it could bring opportunities to get to know new people and ensure a 'guaranteed' daily Mass in one location. A few thought it could lead to better liturgy and involvement. One or two thought this plan best because a reduction to two or three churches might mean repeating this exercise in ten years.

### **The overwhelming majority were not in favour of building a single new church or having just one church for Rushcliffe.**

'We need kind, strong and compassionate communities, not a big building'.

- Opinions were strongly expressed on this point. People thought it would cost too much; that it might not be needed or used; that it would probably be distant from our schools; that it might lack good transport links if outside West Bridgford. Some thought it would make it harder to evangelise and share our faith. One said 'The Church will become more and more distant and out of touch with local communities. If people can see the Church in their midst they are more easily going to come along.'
- Many also commented that a single church, whether new or in an expanded existing one, would be too big and impersonal; a 'Mass factory', one voice said. Some said bluntly that they would not cope in a larger congregation; 'I don't feel safe when it is too many people', one said. Another said 'people may feel intimidated and lost in a big new church'. Others felt that they would not be heard or valued, that they would be 'anonymous'.
- For some, this would be a reason to stop attending Mass, if this is the future in this parish.
- One parent of teenagers wrote thoughtfully about the impact on young people in particular. Their teenagers don't like – and won't attend – the Becket Masses or Mass in the Cathedral, as they find these impersonal. They want 'a true spiritual experience' not just a fulfilment of obligation. What keeps people coming, the parent suggests, is relationships, which are already there in our communities.
- Some were worried that the liturgies at major feasts would be overcrowded.
- Others worried that it would hardly be possible to know the priests, who would become 'remote'.

### **Some opposed any church closures; most expressed a preference for two or three churches rather than one church.**

The responses were divided on what people think is the best option. Many simply oppose any closures of churches, although they also recognise that it will no longer be possible to have Sunday Masses in all the churches going forward. They want to explore other options to keep the buildings open. (See below for more on this).

Most others are in favour of retaining two or three churches rather than aiming at a single church (new or refurbished) because there would be less breaking up of communities. A good proportion see two clusters as the most practical way forward. These might be parishes, or clusters within one large parish. But opinions differ as to which two or three churches should remain open, which should close, and how the clusters might be arranged. Very few responses took account of the prospect of only having one priest for all five areas.

- Some proposed to cluster St Anne's and Holy Spirit; and then the other three village churches.

- A considerable number proposed to cluster Our Lady of the Angels and St Margaret Clitherow, as there has already been good collaboration; and the other three would form a second cluster; or Our Lady of Grace could be closed, leaving two clusters of two churches, each with a priest.
- A few would enlarge St Margaret Clitherow and keep St Anne's as well as it serves many other villages.
- Some think Our Lady of the Angels, Our Lady of Grace and St Margaret Clitherow could merge. Another suggested that a merger of all the countryside churches could give a stronger Catholic presence in the wider area.

The responses were not always clear about whether these ideas were about merger, and/or loss of one of the buildings, nor whether they had taken into account the possibility that we may only have one priest in five years' time (or sooner).

### **3 About the practical and pastoral impacts of closing one, two or three churches**

#### **More hurdles to cross to get to Mass.**

People tried to imagine what it would be like if their own church closed, both for themselves and for others, particularly older people and others with accessibility needs, and children and families. The overriding theme here is that whichever church or churches close, it will be harder for many people to get to Mass. They said:

- The distance will be greater.
- Many don't have their own transport; even those that do may not be able to drive further or drive at night.
- Buses are possible to get into and out of West Bridgford but not across country; they are less frequent on Sundays and not running at all at Christmas. Bus times may not align with Mass times, and people may end up waiting at bus stops in winter. Public transport may not be an option for people with limited mobility. The costs may be an extra burden for some families.
- There may be fewer Masses (though a couple pointed out that with fewer churches, arguably there could be more masses in each church).
- People with limited mobility, or who rely on lift-givers, may not be able cope with new longer journeys, especially if there are no guaranteed parking spaces.
- People who work at week-ends, and families with other Sunday commitments, may simply find the longer travel time impossible. One response talked about not leaving an elderly housebound parent alone for too long.
- People who currently walk to church would have to drive or use public transport.
- The environment will suffer; given Catholic teaching on care for creation, it is a backward step to put arrangements in place which require far more use of cars.

#### **Whether people would go to Mass in a different church in Rushcliffe if their current church were closed.**

Overall, the message here is that people are not necessarily averse to attending a different church; but they will make the change that works best for them. For some, that conflicts with a deep personal attachment to their church community. For many others, it reflects their family situation and personal needs.

The responses fell broadly into three groups:

- Around a quarter said yes, they would go to a different church. For some, this is because it is a Catholic obligation; '...it doesn't matter where I go to Mass as long as the Holy Sacrifice is offered'. For others it is more conditional and depends on Mass times, transport, availability of lifts and parking, weather and health. The choice is sometimes linked to family decisions and needs.

- Another fifth said a fairly definite no – mostly giving the same reasons: transport, distance etc, but also because ‘the community and closeness wouldn’t be there’. Many said no because the question asked about churches *in Rushcliffe*, but they would go to the Cathedral or another church elsewhere, such as in Loughborough or Clifton. Several pointed out that it would be easier in terms of transport to get to churches outside Rushcliffe.
- The majority were uncertain; they said variations of ‘maybe’ and spoke of reluctance and sadness. In part this is because their decision depends on which churches remain open, but the same reasons were again given; transport, distance, family needs, week-end working and so on. Some said attendance might be less frequent. For families, it might depend on whether there is children’s liturgy.

### **The impact on other aspects of parish community life: other sacraments, catechetical programmes and social and ecumenical relationships**

The responses expressed a range of other fears and worries:

- Unless the Church has a presence in the local community, it will be harder to attract people to join us. It only happens when people can see us, one voice said. ‘If the church is not there, how do people find us?’ Closing churches also gives a negative message about the Catholic Church, a message of decline.
- It might be more difficult to attend the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- We might lose some of the weddings, funerals and baptisms that would have taken place in familiar churches, if these are closed, or if they cannot be scheduled in fewer churches.
- Some felt that the sacraments of initiation – baptism, first communion and confirmation – are best celebrated in the local communities to which people belong. Travelling to an unfamiliar church would be unhelpful and the celebrations would be less intimate. Catechetical programmes of preparation might be less well attended if people have to travel further or if the programme group is too large and impersonal. And the link with the local church community maybe lost if preparation is centralised.
- Volunteer catechists may be lost.
- There might be less outreach into communities and less pastoral care available, including visits to the sick.
- Some spoke of how it is already difficult to contact a priest in emergencies; there is a worry that it may not be possible when there is urgent need through severe illness or when people are dying.

There were also some positive viewpoints:

- Centralised catechetical programmes may mean stronger teaching (*NB this is how the programmes currently work*).
- Children from non-Catholic schools may feel less excluded.
- Barriers between church communities may be broken down.
- There may be more scope for social activities if people are willing to organise them.
- Celebrations could potentially be more vibrant with more people involved.

### **The impact on children and young people and our responsibility towards them.**

‘Sunday Mass is more than just a weekly obligation; it’s a foundational part of how my kids grow in understanding, love, and connection to their faith.’

It was very clear that many people feel very strongly that a local church close to home is important for bringing children up in the Catholic faith. The church community supports children’s faith journeys, not just in preparation for the sacraments but also in weekly celebrations where they feel known and included. Losing their local church and community will make it harder to sustain children’s Catholic faith identity. People expressed these concerns:

- Families may not be able to bring children to sacramental preparation classes, or indeed to Sunday Mass regularly, if distances are greater when churches close. Easy access is essential for families.
- For children not at Catholic schools, the local church and its community are vital for their faith development. The church community is where they learn about what it means to be Catholic. If churches are closed, they may not travel elsewhere.
- The role of groups such as cubs, brownies, scouts and guides, and toddler groups, and children's liturgy, are all valuable in developing peer relationships associated with Catholic belonging. They may be lost in any closures.
- There is also loss of family tradition and continuity; parents would like their children to receive the sacraments in the churches and communities where they received them when they were young.

There was also a strong sense that there should be a church that is walking distance from the two Catholic schools. Many people emphasised how that proximity makes a difference, encouraging Mass attendance and enabling involvement in other faith-based activities. If these links are weakened, the church communities suffer, because the young are less present, but so do the Catholic schools. Strong relationships between families, schools and a close local church with its community and life or worship matter for the longer term viability of Catholic education. Here too, there was very strong concern about the idea that Holy Spirit in particular could be at risk of closure. People said:

- If there is no church in West Bridgford, there might be fewer baptisms, and this could affect the numbers for St Edmund Campion.
- Children see their friends and classmates at Mass; if this is dispersed as families either stop attending or go elsewhere, children's faith and future practice will be affected.
- Quite a number of families chose to live here because of the close together Catholic schools and churches. How will they respond if there is no local church in West Bridgford? How will the parish grow if this closeness is lost and does not attract future families?
- The opportunity for children and young people from the schools to visit the local church is important; it is good that the priests visit the schools, but this is not enough.
- Children and young people get drawn into supporting activities such as the SVP through the local church. If they attend a distant or large impersonal church, this may not happen.

#### **4 Positive thinking: if one or more churches have to be closed, how could some of these challenges be overcome?**

The responses to the questions asking about positive ways forward were fewer and briefer. They covered practical suggestions and larger areas of pastoral development.

##### **Find new ways to sustain Sacramental life and parish mission.**

- Can we have a rota for the churches to have Mass, accepting that not all the churches can have Mass every week? A monthly Mass would nourish those who cannot travel and keep communities alive.
- Can we experiment to see if one or more churches can be sustained for weekday prayer and lay-led services even without Mass, or only very occasional Mass, and see if this proves viable?
- Can we have more lay leadership of Services of the Word and Services of the Word with communion, trusting eucharistic ministers, catechists and others to do this?
- Can we stream Masses to the churches that don't have a Mass that Sunday?
- Rather than close any church buildings, re-purpose them as 'centres of mission, prayer and formation'.
- Make the church buildings more available and user-friendly for local community needs.
- Can we research what other churches do so that their communities thrive?

### **More empowerment of laypeople.**

There were an encouraging number of constructive hopes for more lay leadership, more participation in decision-making and more collaboration across the church communities.

- Some asked for more faith formation and training to equip people to take on more leadership responsibilities, including leading the smaller communities, leading Services of the Word and Communion, and presiding at some funerals as happens in other dioceses.
- Some asked for more consultation, more listening, meetings after Mass, better communication, increased social media presence.
- Some proposed ordaining women as deacons (which is currently being explored in Rome) and ordaining married men as priests.
- People are asking for bold decisions and radical actions, rather than what one response described as 'putting sticking plaster on an intermediate solution'.

### **Buildings, transport and parking.**

Although parking featured in many responses, it was not a major concern, not least because it mainly affects Holy Spirit, and most thought it could be managed. A few mentioned other transport options and concerns.

- Can we explore other parking locations around Holy Spirit? Could we arrange to use County Hall, or Welbeck Hall?
- Can we recruit volunteer stewards to manage the parking better around Holy Spirit, so that those most in need can park, and neighbours are respected?
- Can we purchase a minibus (if needed) or organise more people to give lifts? (But also recognise that both are big commitments and might be too much to ask people to commit to this).
- Some were worried that infrequent buses might not have sufficient capacity if numbers need to travel to and from the villages.

A few made suggestions about options if Holy Spirit must go or in the interim if a building project emerges. Can we use the Becket school regularly? Or share a church with another Christian community? Or use another local facility such as the Luttrell Hall?

### **Parish income and fundraising**

Some responses commented in positive terms on financial matters. They were constructive about the need to encourage people to give more. The clear message was the need for clear and detailed explanation of what is needed and for which purposes. One said 'We would have increased our contribution if we had known'. Another said, in relation to the need to improve the social centre at Holy Spirit, 'we are great fundraisers...'. There was a concern that an empty presbytery is not being used. Several thought that if funds are stretched, it does not make sense to set out to fund a new church building.

There was also a concern that any funds from sale of buildings or sites should be used for the churches in this area.

### **What people saw as the benefits of change.**

The responses on this point were brief compared to earlier questions about challenges. They show people's hopes and aspirations for their parish and also their fears.



Around a quarter of respondents said they could not see any benefits, or the benefits were uncertain. Others suggested possible benefits, mostly hypothetical and without much detail. These included:

- The idea that a fresh start could encourage creativity and new opportunities and help us become a more welcoming, resilient and vibrant community, with stronger relationships and collaboration.
- The sense that the future would be more secure, especially for our young people.
- A hope that we would use our resources more effectively, reduce costs, release capital for renovation costs, have less maintenance to do and have better facilities for communities and for young people especially to use.
- A hope that we would protect our priests from intolerable workloads and provide better presbytery accommodation. Some saw this point as the only benefit – that it would be ‘kinder on the priests’.
- Closely related was the hope that priests might have more time to provide pastoral support for people.
- A hope that we would become more integrated, no longer needing comparisons between churches; that more people would take on ministries and roles; that there would be more spiritual and social activities.
- A hope that our outreach and service of others would increase; could there be a café or a foodbank?
- A desire to do more for or with young people.
- A desire to have a lower carbon footprint.

**People expressed a limited and conditional willingness to help ensure our churches are well used for other activities than Mass.**

- Around a quarter of respondents said they would not be able to do more, either for reasons of age or health or work or family commitments. Some said they would contribute through personal prayer. For many, whether they can do more depends on which churches remain open and their locations and the available travel options.
- Others spoke about what they already do. Examples included: leading children’s liturgy; as eucharistic ministers; helping in the charity shop; CAFOD group activities; and in other ways. For some, these existing commitments are all they can presently give.
- A further large number spoke about how more parish involvement could be encouraged and said more generally that they would be willing to help, to pray, to go on rotas, to take part in new activities. But as one voice said, unsure of what might be needed, ‘you tell me’.
- Many suggestions were made about what could be done: rosary groups; fundraising events like bake sales; outreach to migrants; new devotions; more adoration; adult faith formation; Christmas concerts; family events; providing transport assistance; more activities for young people.

**How parish community life could be developed, whatever solution is found.**

***Two questions - 9 and 10 - asked for ideas about how parish community life could be developed; question 10 asked about how we could bring more people into our parishes and perhaps into becoming Catholics; question 9 asked about ways to make sure the churches are well used for other activities beside Mass.***

**What people would like to see:**

- More youth Masses; more modern hymns and music relevant to young people.
- More family orientated Masses.
- More outreach to children in non-Catholic schools.
- More activities for young people, both religious and social.
- More focus on the importance of welcome; inviting people personally.
- More effort to be inclusive of all; especially to groups who are marginalised; and to LGBT people.
- Keeping all the churches open for prayer.
- More engagement with Catholic University students.

- More events; bake sales, carol services, charity events, cultural festivals, talks, clubs, scripture groups, prayer groups, music events, faith sharing groups.
- More social activities, to attract people in and make existing parish members feel more welcome. These need to happen where people are, not in a distant place.
- More use of social media to make our presence and life known.
- Development or use of flyers and free publications about Catholic faith and belonging.
- More practical support for young parents and families.
- More prayer for vocations to ordained ministry and more effort to encourage and promote the possibility.

## **5 Some voices explaining the distinctiveness and concerns of individual local communities**

### **Cotgrave, Our Lady of Grace**

- People spoke about what would be lost if this church closes. They spoke about the charity shop and the donations it makes to other local charities supporting people who are poor or homeless, as well as the impact and witness of the charity shop in the local community and its contribution to parish funds.
- They also spoke about the intimacy of a small church; about the friendly environment which supports a strong children's liturgy group with supportive parents. One voice said Our Lady of Grace is 'particularly welcoming' and especially values youth ministry. Another said 'Our Lady of Grace was a huge part of my journey back to faith as it is a smaller local church'.
- The church community is crucial for children who don't attend Catholic schools, which is the case for some families who attend there.
- People also spoke about the unique history of the church. The community raised the funding to build it and there will be anger if it is closed and the money goes elsewhere.

'Our Lady of Grace is a very special community of Catholic worshippers. The building is a symbol of faith, built by the community in the heart of the community, maintained by the community and precious to the community. The daughter and grandchildren of the pit carpenter who built the altar furniture, are regular attendees, as is the clerk of works for the project. We have a lively children's liturgy every Sunday, new people are warmly welcomed in and the most recent expansion to the building was fully funded by donations and well managed parish funds. The very foundations of the church contain the ashes of one of the Cotgrave miners who died while the church was being built. Closing this church would rip the heart out of the Catholic community at a time when the rapid changes in society are putting great strain on faith and would feel like a betrayal by the hierarchy of an increasingly impersonal Church.'

### **East Leake, Our Lady of the Angels**

- People spoke about the strength of the parish community; new members and visitors are noticed and welcomed, which is not the case in larger churches. This would be lost if the church is closed. 'If we are not there, how do people find us? We have new families moving into the village who find us and attend Mass'.
- The parish community has its own social activities; they are able to notice and support when people face pressures such as mental health conditions or other illness. They do not feel people would travel to social activities in a distant location.
- They were developing good links with Keyworth before they were directed by the diocese to try to merge with Shepshed and then directed to abandon this process. Many would welcome returning to closer links and even a shared parish with Keyworth.

- They also greatly value their local presence in the village and their strong ecumenical relationships. They do fundraising for local charitable needs through events and entertainments attended by many from the village who are not Catholics. They do not feel this would happen in a distant 'superchurch'.

'The entire heritage that was built will be lost. Some of these events cannot be replicated elsewhere as the tradition is related to the village and is part of the village life'.

### **Keyworth, St Margaret Clitherow**

- This community, one voice said, 'are actually feeling on a high'. They have 'worked our socks off to achieve a church built on its people not its bricks'. There are many new activities and programmes, including the work to get Live Simply accreditation and the Peace Garden.
- Mass attendance is good; people 'have worked very hard to establish this church'.
- They too feel that the work to build strong ecumenical relationships would be lost. 'Closure of St Margaret Clitherow would be met with great disappointment by other churches in Keyworth.'
- For some, closure would be 'unforgivable'; 'I have been attending since 1984', one voice said.
- There is also a positive recognition that St Margaret Clitherow could be part of the solution: 'It would make a lot of sense to expand St Margaret Clitherow at Keyworth, as the Church sits on a good parcel of land and has the potential for further building.'

### **Radcliffe, St Anne's**

- Like the other churches, St Anne's means a lot to people.

'It would break my heart if St Anne's were to close, it's a vibrant caring community, so much a part of me'

'St Anne's is a massive part of my life, I have friends and enjoy participating in all the activities. When I go home there is nobody else in my home I am dependent on St Anne's for care, love, friendship, my spiritual life my mental health.'

- People see St Anne's as a thriving community. Working teams meet informally weekly after Mass. Many parish members call in during the week to pray and to check on the church.
- Like other village churches, they have developed strong relationships with other churches and shared activities. These relationships are personal, but there is also a tradition of working together for World Day of Prayer, in Lent discussion groups, and a long-standing bereavement group. These could be lost if the church closes.
- Voices here also expressed concern about Bingham; people in Bingham felt 'deserted' when Sunday Mass in the Methodist Church stopped a couple of years ago and never returned. St Anne's location is the best link for Catholics from Bingham.

### **West Bridgford, Holy Spirit**

There was a large volume of very specific comments about the position of Holy Spirit and the suggestion that it is at risk of closure. Many of the themes have already been covered. In summary:

- Above all, the sense that it would be 'madness' not to have a Catholic church building in the heart of West Bridgford.
- But also the risk of losing so many of the activities and outreach that currently happen there, for both older generations and children and young people. The Catholic Scouts and Cubs and their camps are vital

activities, and Holy Spirit is their home. One voice said Holy Spirit was a 'hub' for families, long-term parishioners and many others. The social centre is a vital resource.

- The proximity to the schools is seen as crucial: mums walk to the toddler group after dropping children off at school, for example.
- Closure might reduce outreach to the community, especially if a new church is distant: sports teams; the dementia café; the activities for which the social centre is hired; and many others.
- There is gladness that Holy Spirit has been 'revitalised' by the Hong Kong families who have joined there.
- There was a sense that parking and refurbishment issues are short-term and can be managed.
- There were many testimonies of how much Holy Spirit means to people; 'the priests have always been there for me, and the community has been welcoming, supportive and loving. To lose this... would be a sin'.

## **6 Reactions to the context and evidence and comments on the consultation process.**

### **Most people found the evidence and context unconvincing and inadequate.**

- Most responses found the evidence and context unconvincing and inadequate, given the importance of the issues at stake and their impact on people's lives and faith. The evidence was described as 'poor', 'superficial', 'vague' and 'thin'. A number said that the proposals (although the context described the possible closures as 'options', most people interpreted these as 'proposals') simply did not make sense, in relation to the evidence presented. For example, why is East Leake not at risk, when Cotgrave is?
- A few found it satisfactory and helpful; one response said 'convincing'.
- There was particular concern that the evidence presented did not take account of the personal and community impact of closing churches, with Holy Spirit mentioned in particular. It was profoundly puzzling and disturbing for many that Holy Spirit could be at risk of closure when it is 'bustling with life' and has a crucial presence in the local community. People do not understand why it should be considered at risk of closure.
- There was also a sense for some that more information about the diocesan picture was needed. People are confused and worried; the diocese is asking for money for mission and outreach yet also closing churches. This does not make sense. One said 'I don't feel the diocese is being open and honest'.
- They also want to know more about the long-term strategy of the diocese. What is the pastoral plan going up to 2050? People would like to hear directly from the Bishop or other diocesan officials.
- People want to know who are the 'property professionals' and whether they are independent or have any vested interests. They also asked whether planning permission for change of use of the Holy Spirit site had actually been sought.

### **Many spoke about the lack of adequate statistics and explanations.**

A large number of responses asked for better and more up to date statistics. In particular, they asked for:

- Up to date Mass attendance figures, to estimate whether we have returned to pre-Covid numbers. There was puzzlement about why the figures given stopped at 2021, when the Diocesan Yearbook gives figures for 2023 showing an increase in attendance from 2021 for the diocese. It was also pointed out that the PMG's figures for Mass attendance in December 2023 show an average of 673 attending, when the Yearbook gives the figure as 424. Why these discrepancies?
- People want to know whether projections for capacity needed have taken into account fluctuations in the birthrate, existing and projected new housing developments and plans in many parts of the parish area, and incoming migrant populations?
- People don't understand where the projection of providing for 600 mass-goers comes from and asked whether this is the size of a projected new church if that proposal goes forward.

- It would also be useful to know the numbers of children in Catholic schools linked to each church community and numbers for Holy Communion and Confirmation.<sup>1</sup>

### **Some expressed concerns over financial data.**

The overriding theme here is the need for transparency and openness. Many responses asked for this. People would like to know:

- Why and how we are operating at a deficit, since it is thought that all the churches were financially viable before we merged?
- Whether the deficit relates to one church more than others?
- What is being done to reduce the deficit?
- What the running costs are for each church, and whether it is accurate to say that any of the churches are self-sustaining financially?
- What are the items of major renovation needed at Holy Spirit, and have these been costed?
- What has happened to the funds set aside for capital/building expenditure in Holy Spirit by earlier parish priests?
- Whether any of the church sites have been valued for re-development, and at what level?
- Where the money would come from if the decision is taken to build a new church?

They also asked for the parish accounts to be available (which has now happened) and explained in full.

### **What people thought about the consultation process.**

Here too, the main concern was a lack of transparency and openness. But there was also a strong desire to contribute and be part of the decision-making process and be treated as co-responsible adults. People want to engage; they accept that changes have to be made. While some recognised that the case made is 'compelling', the majority expressed fears and concerns. Many are finding it difficult to trust this process.

- In a large number of responses, people sadly saw the consultation as pointless because they believe – or fear – that a decision has already been made. One voice said people feel 'kept in the dark'.
- Some think the Bishop has already decided. Quite a few were surprised and discouraged to hear from Fr John at the Becket meeting that there was an expectation to try to achieve one church. They asked why this had not been communicated to the communities sooner. In particular, some felt that the work of amalgamation over the past two years was 'a waste of time' as some churches are now to be closed. Some felt there is now a degree of suspicion and mistrust about what will happen.
- They also wanted to understand why East Leake has suddenly been included, so late in the process.
- There was also distress at the rushed timeline and the way in which this process was launched just as school holidays began. 'If this process has been going on for 18 months, why is this consultation so late and rushed?'
- There was concern about missing voices; and strong concern about whether young people had been consulted and heard. None spoke at the Becket meeting. People mentioned altar servers and young people who help with catechetical programmes in particular.
- Some asked to use synodal ways of working in the process going forward, so that the decision-making is truly communal and based on listening to the Holy Spirit together, and not just on finances and fears. Others mentioned the need for prayer and asked if the PMG had spent time in prayer and reflecting on scripture.

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<sup>1</sup> The latter can be found in the Diocesan Yearbook.

### **What people thought about the questionnaire.**

There was a strong level of consensus criticising the questionnaire design and contents. Some asked whether it had been trialled, and how the data would be analysed. In particular people thought:

- There were too many questions that repeated earlier questions, which was ‘annoying’. One response said ‘Why are you asking the same question all the time?’
- Many of the questions (9 out of 14) asked about hypothetical and uncertain scenarios: it was impossible to answer most of them without knowing whether there would be one, two or three churches, and where these would be.
- Some of the questions were seen as not relevant to this process: for example, question 10, which although a valuable question in itself, belongs to a different kind of exercise.
- Some found it hard to read, too technical and wordy; others found the data inadequate (as above). The context and ‘assessment’ information on pp. 3 and 5 was too small and difficult to read, and p. 5 was also upsetting for some.
- It should have asked for other kinds of demographic data such as marital status, sex, ethnicity, work status, as these are also relevant to the issues involved.
- People would have preferred a clear and definite set of options on which they could comment and vote, giving a clear steer.

### **About what happens next**

There were a number of comments about how the next stages of this process should be done.

- Quite a few would like to see one or two clear detailed costed proposals next. One asked for a ‘reasoned cost/benefit analysis’ of a limited number of options.
- People asked for effective high quality communication, once decisions are made, focusing on the bigger picture as well as local challenges. They also need regular updates and opportunities to raise concerns after Mass, and opportunities to discuss in small groups.
- Some said it is important to listen to all the objections.
- Some urged the vital importance of listening to the voices of children and young people about these challenges, as their voices do not seem to be well represented yet.
- Others asked what we could learn from other churches, both Catholic and Christian, that have gone through similar processes.
- They would also like an opportunity for dialogue with the Bishop; and they would like to know whether the material used for diocesan decision-making will be public for parishioners to access.
- One or two voices also asked for an environmental impact assessment to be made for any building projects that are decided on. If possible, this should factor in increased ongoing travel costs for those attending the church.
- When the next steps are clear and agreed, plan a structured transition; work out how to integrate people, ministries, activities; how to share good practice and foster connections. One said ‘Start the changes slowly and carefully. Allow proper evaluation to take place, success and failure, as the whole picture emerges.’

### **Final word**

Many people pleaded for decisions that look forward and listen to younger generations. As one voice said, ‘I care deeply about the changes that are about to be made and hope that you get it right for the future generations’.

## 7 Appendix

### 1 How this report was compiled

The task of analysing the questionnaire responses was given to a group led by Ceci Li and Pat Jones. The members of the group were recruited from local church groups and the East Leake parish pastoral council following suggestions from Fr. John and others. Seven volunteers shared the work:

Stewart Molyneux from St Margaret Clitherow  
 Stuart Young and Simon Lake from St Anne's.  
 Kathy Doust and Anita Blake from Holy Spirit  
 Maureen Jarvis from Our Lady of Grace  
 Susan Fenny from Our Lady of the Angels.

There were three stages:

- First, Ceci loaded all the responses into NVIVO, a software programme used for analysing data, and did some initial sorting of the data into broad themes. Any responses on paper were scanned and included.
- Second, we worked out a framework of how to tackle the questions (because there was a great deal of repetition across the questions) in seven groups. We asked the volunteer analysts to take a group of data extracts and themes each (two volunteers – Stuart and Simon - shared a large group; Pat took on the first two groups covering the first 5 questions). Their task was to read everything and produce a short summary of around 3-6 pages. All the volunteer analysts spent between two and three weeks on this task. The summaries together were over 50 pages.
- Third, Pat received all the summaries and developed a draft report, which was then reviewed by the volunteer team and PMG members and finalised.

We worked on the principle that we should read everything that people had said. Overall, we processed over 8,400 pieces of data. Some were a few words; most were a few lines; some filled a page. The single largest category of data related to what people saw as the challenges presented by closing one or more churches.

The aim in the report is to give a picture of what people said across all the questions. There was a great deal of repetition, because the questions were repetitive, so people repeated their answers. The report is not structured according to the questions. Rather, it is structured to present the most important messages coming from the consultation. Inevitably there will be points left out. We could not include everything. We wanted to keep the report to a length that people will read. It is probably too long!

Almost all the data in this consultation were qualitative; that is, people spoke in their own words and said whatever they wanted to say. This means that although we give rough proportions to indicate how many people shared a particular view or concern, it is not possible to give clear percentages. If some of the questions had been quantitative, that is, boxes to tick, we could have done this but would not have heard individual voices in the same way. So in the report we use words like 'most', 'some', 'a few', 'many' and 'a tiny number'. We can say this much with confidence after reading the same thought expressed dozens of different ways.

#### Data Protection

The consultation process is covered by the diocesan privacy policy and current legislation about data.<sup>2</sup> Only Ceci Li, as a parish staff member, has had access to the identities of respondents. All the data seen or

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<sup>2</sup> See [Privacy](#) The diocesan Data Controller is the Chief Operating Officer, Mr David Laws: [coo@dioceseofnottingham.uk](mailto:coo@dioceseofnottingham.uk)

handled by the volunteers or the PMG has been anonymised, that is, analysed with no indication of who is speaking. The raw data will be deleted when this process is concluded.

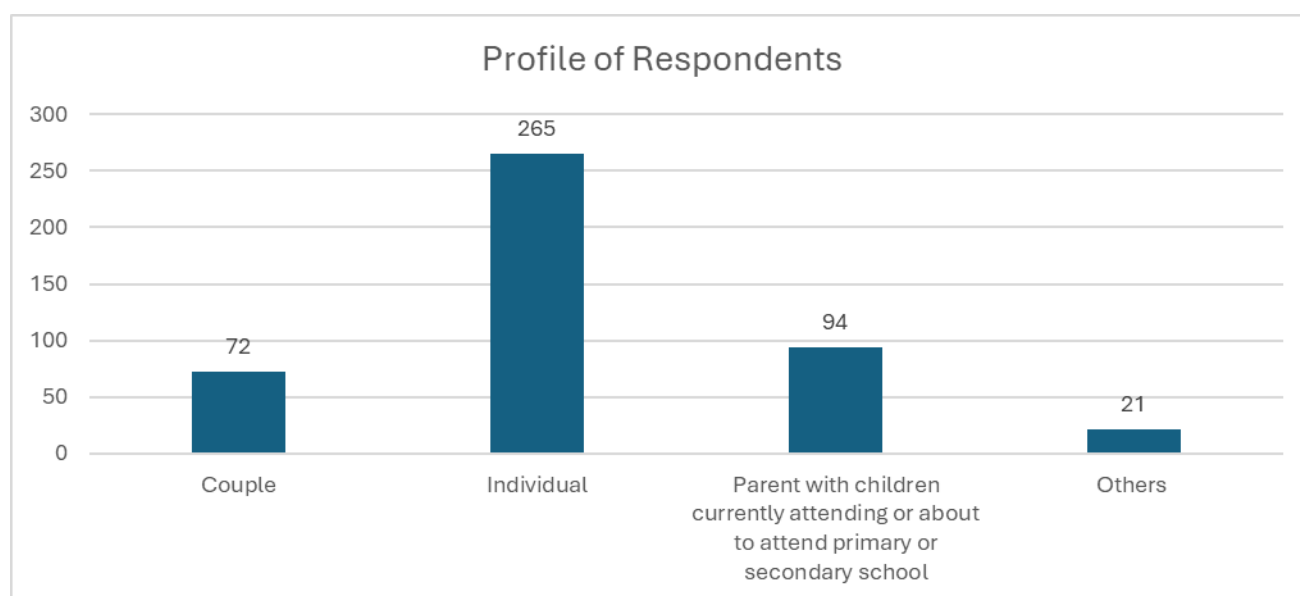
## 2 Profile of Respondents

There were 406 questionnaires returned. Most responses came from individuals, but around a fifth (20%) of responses identified themselves as couples or families, so the total represents around 480 people.

Since Mass attendance at our five churches is around 767<sup>3</sup>, this means that well over half our mass-goers took part. Two returned blank questionnaires.

Some of the questions collecting this data allowed people to tick more than one box, so the totals vary.

### 1 Who responded?



Around a fifth (21%) of respondents told us they were parents, either of school age children or with pre-school children.

The parents and families had 90 children attending either St Edmund Campion (35) or the Becket School (31), and 38 children attending non-Catholic schools or other education options. Since there are usually at least 75 families in Annunciation parish with a child making first communion, this means the views of most parents are not represented. The Becket catchment area is wider, and covers more parishes, but this still means that only a small number of families with children at the Becket were represented.

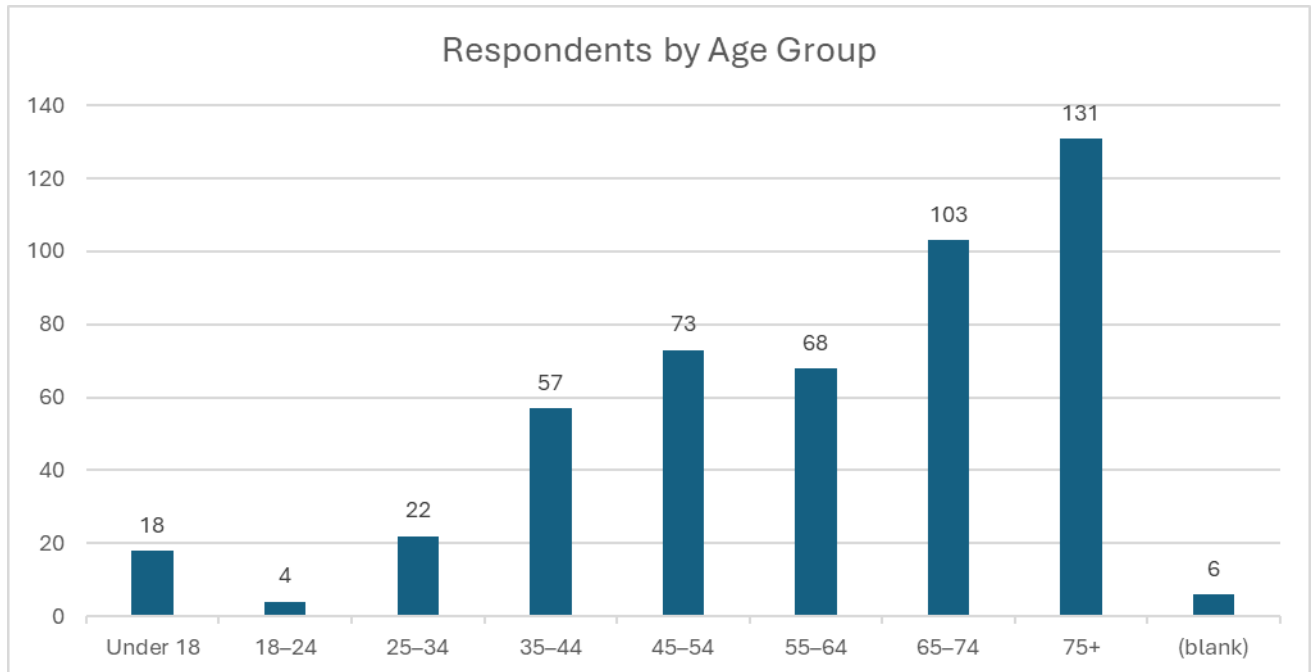
Note: Other groups include: parents with preschool-aged children (2), scout leaders (1), senior leaders at The Becket School (1), members of the travelling community (2), and grandparents or extended family members living in Rushcliffe.

<sup>3</sup>The Parish Mission Group estimated Mass attendance in 2023 as around 677 for the 4 Annunciation churches. The estimate for OLoA is around 90 (tbc). The 2024 Diocesan Yearbook statistics for 2023 give smaller figures: HS:278; SMC: 48; OLOG: 72 SA: 126; OLoA: 65, giving a total of 489.

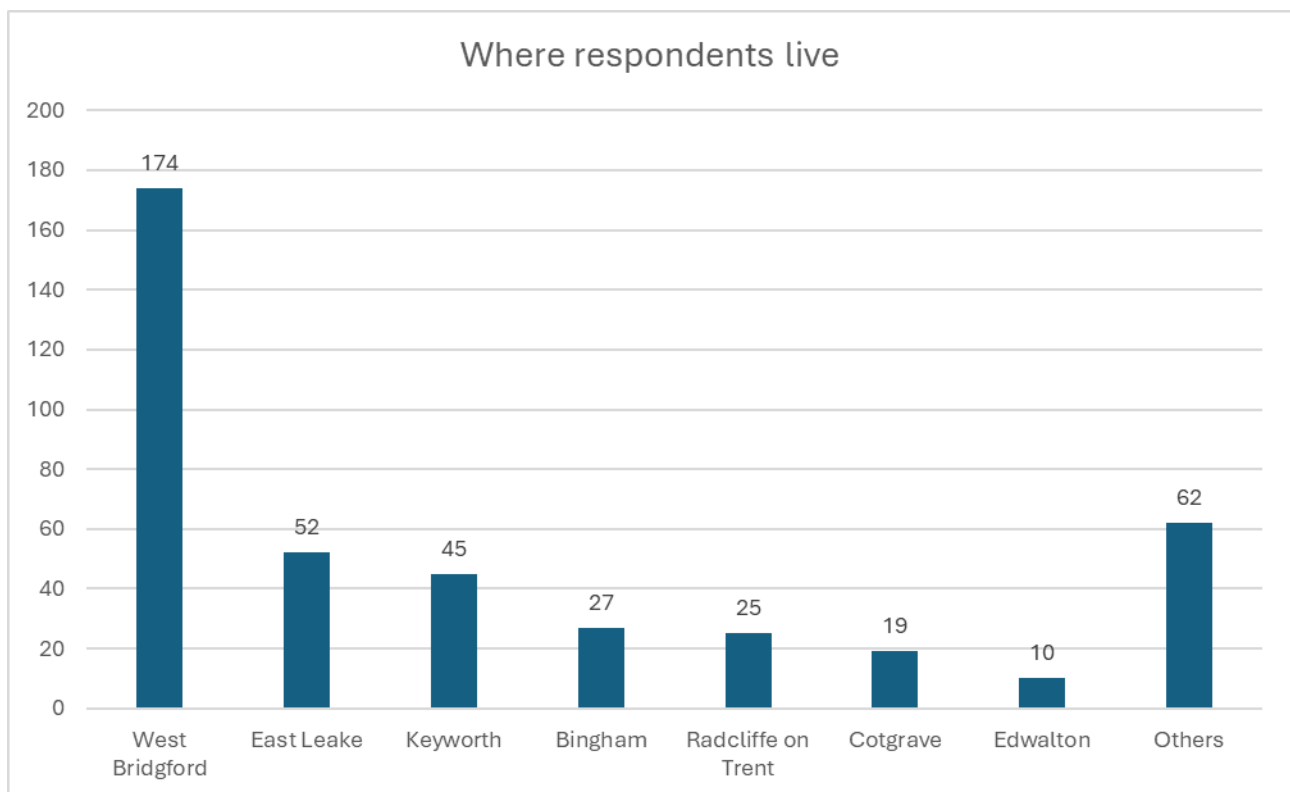


## 2 Which age groups do they represent?

Almost half the respondents were aged 65 or over.  
Only 22 respondents - around 5% - were under 25.

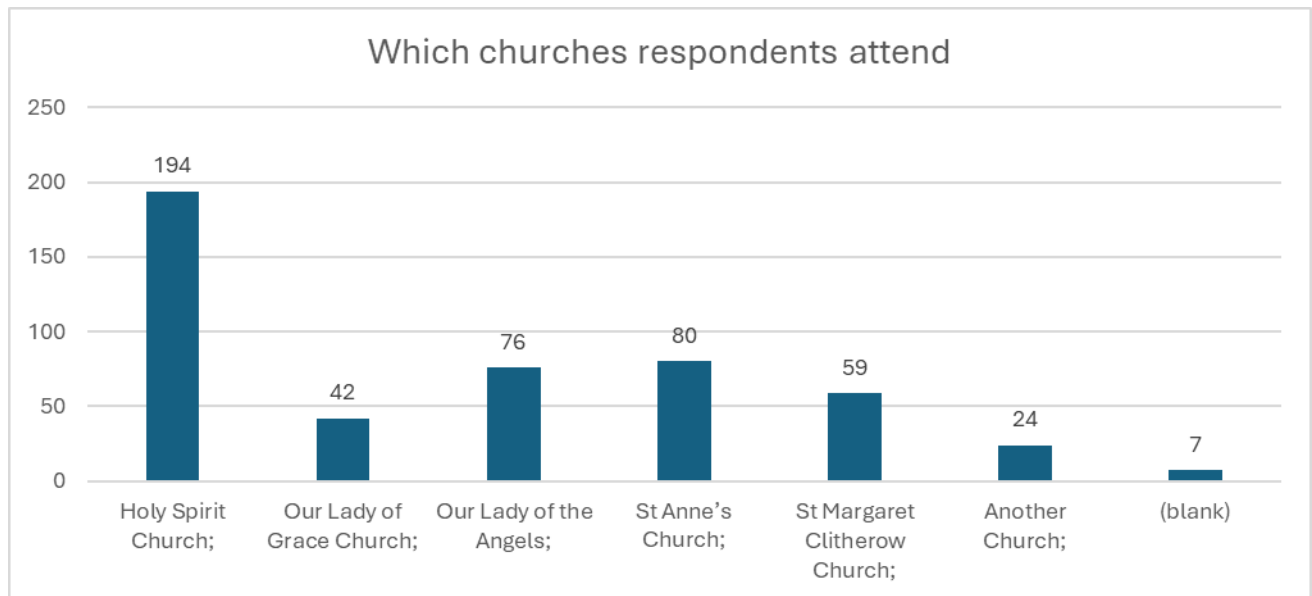


## 3 Where do they live?



'Other' covers one or two respondents from around thirty other villages and areas of the city, including Beeston, Wollaton, Kinoulton and the Park, as well as the Vale of Belvoir, Wiverton, Rempstone, Bottesford and other places.

#### 4 Which churches do they attend?



#### 5 How do they travel to church?

Parishioners travel in more than one way, so percentages do not add up to 100%.

Almost 80% travel by car. Only three respondents said they were given lifts.

An encouraging number - 178 (44%) - came on foot or on bikes.

Only a small number - 17 (4%) - came by bus.