



Coronavirus, Church & You Survey
Catholics in the UK

Report of Results | **September 2020**

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Summary

The UK Government set in place a lockdown in response to the Covid-19 virus outbreak on 23 March 2020. Church buildings in the UK were closed for worship, so during the lockdown clergy and lay people serving in various apostolates had quickly to find new ways of fulfilling their duties to care for their congregations and the wider community. This involved learning how to do things in the virtual, online world, as well as working out what things were essential and what things could be done safely without risk of spreading the virus.

This sudden crisis for Churches was a mixed experience. On the one hand, the lockdown severely restricted the sacramental life of parishes, impacted on pastoral care, and constrained social and charitable activities. On the other hand, for those with online access, worship took on new and innovative forms. Many clergy and lay leaders rose to the challenge of operating in the virtual environment. The crisis proved to be a tragedy but also an opportunity. For the Catholic community, where Mass is so central to worship and identity, online worship detached many people from a central pillar of their faith.

This survey on the Catholic community in England, Wales and Scotland, was launched on 19th May and closed on the 26th July. Bishops, clergy, religious orders, lay and diocesan networks were asked to promote it directly. The survey aimed to try to reach a large sample of churchgoers, clergy and lay people, and ask them not just what they did but also what they felt about the experience, and what they thought the future might hold. How well did people cope with the pandemic? Did it strengthen or weaken their faith? How was it for clergy and lay leaders trying to work in this new environment? How have those receiving ministry found this novel experience? Will virtual ministry become part of the post-pandemic landscape, and will this be a good move for churches?

The survey, which is part of a wider survey of UK Christian responses to the present crisis, was undertaken by [Professor Francis Davis](#) (University of Birmingham and Oxford), [Professor Andrew Village](#) (York St John University) and [Professor Leslie Francis](#) (University of Warwick) who collaborated with Catholic Voices to publicise the survey and produce this report.

Who took the survey?

When the survey closed there were over 2,500 responses, but a number of these were too incomplete to use, and the effective sample size was 2,292. Of these, 93% were from England, 2% from Scotland, 4% from Wales, and 1% from elsewhere. Most (83%) were born in the UK; of those who were born elsewhere and gave their country of birth (395 respondents), 17% were from Ireland, 6% from Italy, 6% from Poland, 5% from the USA, and 12% from an African nation.

Just under two-thirds (63%) of the sample were women, this rose to 68% when the 155 ordained clergy were excluded from the calculation. Of the lay people surveyed, 30% were under 50, 46% were 50-69,

¹ We are aware that many English Christians use the term ‘Roman Catholic’ as a descriptor for our target research group, as does the Catholic Education Service in its provision of maintained schools. The term ‘Catholic’ is used throughout here though to reflect common usage within the community surveyed.

and 24% were 70 or older. Clergy had a slightly different profile with equivalent figures of 18%, 60%, and 21%.

The majority lived in towns (44%) or suburbs (28%) with fewer in rural areas (17%) or inner cities (11%). The survey asked people to indicate their household status, and 22% said they lived alone, 74% with others and 4% in a community of some sort. Of 1674 in family households, 10% included children under 6, 16% children aged 6-12, 16% teenagers, 74% at least one adult under 70, and 28% at least one adult aged 70 or older.

Working patterns can be difficult to capture because many people combine several roles. The survey asked about work before lockdown and allowed respondents to tick more than one category. For lay people, 48% were in full or part-time work, 6% homemaker/carer, 2% unemployed, 4% student and 38% retired. For clergy, 17% were retired.

Of those who were ordained (155, 7% of the sample), just under half (48%) were parish clergy, 12% retired but still active in ministry, and only 7% retired and no longer active in ministry. For lay people (2137, 93% of the sample), 915 (43%) were making some kind of contribution, such as reader (48% of lay leaders), Minister of the Word (16%), Parish pastoral worker (6%), Non-ordained chaplain (5%), worship assistant (6%), or Extraordinary Minister of the Holy Communion (61%)².

Experience of the pandemic

How people experienced the pandemic may depend on whether they, or people they knew, caught Covid-19 and whether they had to self-isolate in a more extreme way than most. In this sample, 3% (73) reported they had or had had the virus, though a further 21% (445) were not sure if they had caught it or not because the symptoms can be mild or non-existent. These proportions are similar to those reported from the larger sample of people from the Church of England who completed the survey. A much higher percentage of the present sample (38%) reported that they had self-isolated, over and above the normal social distancing and restricted movements imposed on the general population. Over a third (39%) knew someone who had suffered from the virus. In most cases these people were either general acquaintances (17%) and/or people from church (12%), but for some these were close friends (7%), immediate (3%) or wider (7%) family.

Infection rates varied between the age groups, being more frequent among the under 50s (5%) than those aged 50-69 (3%) or 70+ (1%). These results were very similar to the Church of England sample, and may reflect the likelihood that young people were working or in a family where someone was working, and older people found it easier to stay away from sources of infection.

Effects of the pandemic on well-being

The survey assessed the effects of the lockdown using a simple scale (negative change (-), no change (0), or positive change (+)) applied to a wide range of aspects of well-being. Responses to each item are shown in Table 1. It is clear that the effects varied considerably between items. Those that had a more positive response included being more creative, more neighbourly, more prayerful, and feeling closer to God. Those that had a more negative response included feeling more exhausted, anxious, fatigued, and frustrated, as well as feeling further from family, church and others.

² Of the 915 lay leaders, 337 (36%) had more than one licensed ministry role.

Closer inspection shows that some items had similar response patterns, and these could be grouped into scales measuring different dimensions of well-being. These were identified as:

- **Stress** (stress, exhaustion, fatigue, and anxiety),
- **Negative affect** (lack of excitement, unhappiness, boredom, and frustration),
- **Positive affect** (thankfulness, hopefulness, neighbourliness, and trust)
- **Relating to others** (closeness to family, church, or others),
- **Relating to God** (closeness to God, prayerfulness).

These scales were then used to examine differences between various groups of people. Statistical analysis was used to identify which differences were unlikely to be simply due to chance, and the summarized results are shown in Table 2.

Table 1 Well-being items assessing changes during the lockdown

Stress	% Responding:			
	-	0	+	
More stressed	32	42	27	Less stressed
More exhausted	30	46	24	Less exhausted
More fatigued	39	43	19	Less fatigued
More anxious	36	41	23	Calmer
Negative Affect				
Less excited	33	60	7	More excited
Unhappier	23	58	19	Happier
More bored	28	55	17	Less bored
More frustrated	38	49	13	Less frustrated
Positive affect				
Less thankful	3	32	65	More thankful
Less hopeful	15	52	33	More hopeful
Less neighbourly	5	36	59	More neighbourly
Less trusting	13	66	21	More trusting
Relating to others				
Further from others	34	38	28	Closer to others
Further from church	33	38	29	Closer to church
Further from family	25	35	39	Closer to family
Relating to God				
Less prayerful	12	34	54	More prayerful
Further from God	9	41	50	Closer to God

Note: Based on a sample of 2, 292 lay people and priests in the Catholic Church in the UK.

Table 2 Summary of differences in response to lockdown between various groups

		Sex	Age	Household status	Self-isolation	Ministry status
Stress	<i>Who was most stressed by lockdown?</i>	No difference between men and women	Younger people felt more stressed than did older people	No difference between those living alone and others	No difference between the self-isolated and others	Lay people slightly more stressed than lay ministers or priests
Negative affect	<i>Who was more down-beat?</i>	Men slightly less positive than women	Younger people felt less positive than did older people	No difference between those living alone and others	No difference between the self-isolated and others	No differences between priests, lay ministers, or lay people
Positive affect	<i>Who was more up-beat?</i>	Women felt more up-beat than did men	Older people felt more positive than did younger people	Those living with others were more positive than were those living alone	No difference between the self-isolated and others	Priests and lay ministers felt more positive than did lay people receiving ministry
Relating to others	<i>Who felt the closest to other people?</i>	Women felt closer than did men	Older people felt closer than did younger people	No difference between those living alone and others	No difference between the self-isolated and others	Clergy and lay ministers felt closer than did lay people receiving ministry
Relating to God	<i>Who felt the closest to God?</i>	Women felt closer to God than did men	Older people felt closer than did younger people	No difference between those living alone and others	Those who self-isolated felt closer to God than did others	Laitly involved with ministry felt closer to God than either priests or lay people receiving ministry

Examining the table suggests there were some clear trends:

- Where there was a difference between the sexes, it was women who appeared to have the more positive experience
- There was a strong age-effect, with younger people suffering more than older people on average
- Living alone or with others made little difference, apart from positive affect, where those living with others seemed to do slightly better. This was the opposite trend to that in the Church of England sample.
- Those who had to self-isolate did not seem to suffer as a result. If anything, they felt closer to God than those who did not. Perhaps this is a measure the strain of trying to carry on semi-normal existence, rather than having to accept the enforced removal of normality.
- Those offering pastoral care and support (clergy and lay) tended to report more positive experiences than those receiving it. The lay people who were not in some authorised lay leadership role seemed to suffer worse than others.

The sample of Catholic clergy was small (and much smaller than the proportion of clergy in the Church of England survey), so results from this group are not fully representative. The Bishops and Religious Superiors will need to ensure that the experiences of Catholic clergy in the UK during the Covid-19 crisis are understood.

The age and sex effects on responses to the pandemic seem to be widespread among UK churchgoers, judging by the similarities of these results to those from the Church of England study. Although older people were more vulnerable to serious medical effects of the virus, they were generally less likely to suffer psychologically from the experience and impact of lockdown.

Experiences of receiving and giving pastoral care and support

The experience of people giving pastoral care differed from the experience of people receiving it. We decided to separate these two groups in the survey and ask them questions that were most relevant to them. Rather than make the split between clergy and others, we decided to ask the question ‘Have you been acting in a ministry capacity (ordained or lay) during the lockdown?’ and use that instead in order to tease out shared dimensions of support. We did not want to be too specific about what a ‘ministry capacity’ might be because we might otherwise have missed important work that would not normally come under the category of ‘Christian ministry’. It also allowed lay leaders involved in ministry, who may have been busy during the lockdown, to share their experiences. The downside was that that some people who contributed to ministry in a limited way (such as reading the Bible or doing intercessions for an online service) may have gone down the ‘giving ministry route’ and then struggled to relate to questions about wider pastoral provision. Some people may have both offered and received ministry, but we did not want them to have to complete both sections in what was already a rather long questionnaire. In general, the procedure seemed to work satisfactorily, though we recognise it was not perfect.

As you might expect, the profiles of those who gave and received ministry were rather different (Table 3). Half the people who gave some sort of ministry were women, compared with two-thirds of those who received ministry. The high proportion of lay people among those who offered pastoral support in the lockdown (75%) suggests their skills and service were not entirely overlooked during this time, though this might partly be the result of a low response among clergy.

Table 3 Profiles of those receiving and giving ministry during lockdown

		Received ministry	Gave ministry
Number:		1729	366
		%	%
Sex	Male	34	50
	Female	66	50
Age	< 50	30	25
	50-69	46	55
	70+	25	20
Ordained	No	98	75
	Yes	2	25

Receiving ministry

Accessing online worship

Of the 1,729 people who received rather than gave ministry in the lockdown, 93% accessed services online (a comparable figure to the 91% in the Church of England survey). This high figure undoubtedly reflects the fact that this was an online survey: accessing the experiences of those who were free from the entanglements of the virtual world will require different sorts of survey work. This high figure was more or less constant over the six weeks of the survey, It may be that those who wanted to, did so early on rather than wait.

Those who did access online worship used a variety of sources (Table 4). It is interesting to compare the results with the Church of England sample, where a much higher proportion had accessed services provided by their own parish or local church. Catholics were more likely to access services from a Catholic parish that was not their own, and less likely to use services outside their denomination. Where sources were specified, they included services provided by the Vatican, various religious communities (including L'Arche and Taizé), and services from across the global Church, especially the USA.

Table 4 Sources of online worship for Catholics and Anglicans during the lockdown

	Catholics (n = 1616)	CoE (n = 2276)
	%	%
Own church/parish	50	82
Another local church in your denomination	68	46
Church from another denomination	8	19
Diocesan service	25	22
Catholic Church nationally	22	18
A broadcaster	12	30
Individuals	12	5
Other	5	6

Participation in online worship

Participation is obviously an issue for online worship. We asked people whether they had been invited to do various things actively during online Mass, liturgies or other virtual devotions and if they had participated when they were asked (e.g. sign of peace, prayer). The most obvious activities were praying, reciting or responding to liturgy, or singing (Table 5).

Invitation rates seemed relatively low for things such as prayer or reciting or responding to the liturgy, though most who were invited to do so did join in. Actively inviting people to actively respond where appropriate might be something that parishes and local churches could enhance as they learn more about what it is like to be a recipient.

Table 5 Participation of 1616 Catholics who accessed online services compared to 2276 people from the Church of England

Activity:	Not invited		Invited but did not participate		Invited and participated	
	RC %	CoE %	RC %	CoE %	RC %	CoE %
Recite liturgy	63	48	11	15	25	37
Sing	75	58	9	15	16	27
Pray	57	46	11	14	32	40
Light a candle	84	75	8	11	8	14
Type in prayer requests	82	82	11	12	6	6
Take Holy Communion	98	82	2	9	4	9
Eucharistic adoration	73	NA	13	NA	15	NA
Rosary	68	NA	15	NA	17	NA
Other	95	93	2	2	4	5

As one might expect, Catholics were significantly less likely to adopt the practice of taking bread and wine at home as part of an online service than those in the Church of England. This was a controversial subject: this practice, which involves taking presumably unconsecrated bread and wine, would be an alien practice to most Catholics and not reflective of Catholic teaching and practice regarding the Eucharist³. Interestingly this tendency was also reflected among Anglo-catholics within the Church of England. Those with more Protestant or ‘evangelical’ leanings in the Church of England tended to be more in favour of this idea.

We asked people specifically about their views on various practices regarding Holy Communion using six statements with which they could disagree or agree (Table 6).

³ More detailed analysis would be needed regarding the ‘taking of Holy Communion’ (e.g. visit by an Extraordinary Eucharistic minister or self-administration of unconsecrated bread and wine) to interpret these findings.

Table 6 Percentage agreement with various practices of Holy Communion during the lockdown

	% Agreeing			
	RC	AC	BC	EV
It is right for clergy to celebrate communion in their parish church behind closed doors	76	NA	NA	NA
It is right for clergy to celebrate communion alone in their own homes without broadcasting the service to others	44	49	34	25
It is right for clergy to celebrate communion at home if they are broadcasting the service to others	61	72	62	51
It is right for people participating online to celebrate communion spiritually from home	85	NA	NA	NA
It is right for people at home to receive communion from their own bread and wine as part of an online communion service	13	23	43	56

Note. Based on samples of lay people and clergy in the Roman Catholic ($n = 1954$) and Church of England ($n =$ of 4701) surveys. RC = Roman Catholic; Church of England: AC = Anglo-catholic; BC = Broad church; EV = Evangelical. NA = these items were not in the CoE survey.

Two of the items in the Catholic survey were not given to people in the Church of England survey. A high proportion of Catholics were in favour of people ‘celebrating communion spiritually at home’. Most Catholics we presume would have interpreted this question as involving making an ‘act of spiritual communion’ (desiring union with Christ prior to Mass or for those who cannot participate in the Eucharist, for example in the fashion of a particular prayer of ‘spiritual communion’). Making an act of spiritual communion is a long-standing tradition within Catholicism that has grown in awareness and popularity since lockdown.

Quality of worship and future practice

People generally appreciated the quality of the services: 67% felt they made full use of the medium, 25% felt they made some use, and only 8% felt they made little use. Similarly, 62% felt services were professionally presented, and only 4% that they were amateurish. Despite this, relatively few thought that online was better than normal (23%), 57% felt there was not much difference, while 19% felt worship was worse.

What might happen after lockdown when churches re-open (fully)? Well over half (61%) said they would revert back to services in church, but 35% said they would use online worship sometimes if it was available. There seemed little danger of a mass exodus to the virtual world, with only 4% thinking they would worship mainly or entirely online.

It seems that virtual worship during the lockdown has been generally well received. While it may remain something that some people might dip into in the future, few would stop attending church altogether.

Contact with ministers and receiving support

Of 1,690 who answered the question, 63% said they had had contact with clergy or those involved in lay apostolates or support associations (compared with 82% in the Church of England survey). For these people this contact included ‘just checking’ (42% received this sort of contact), pastoral support (26%), practical help (13%), prayer (16%), and church administration (24%). The means of contact varied slightly depending on the reason: email seemed to predominate, especially for administration as you might expect. Phone calls were also used to check that people were doing OK and to offer pastoral support, though not as often as email.

How did the support received from the church during the lockdown compare with that received from other sources? It was difficult to separate those who received no support, because that source was not relevant to them, from those who looked for support but did not get it. Instead we have concentrated on looking at the relative use of different sources and what proportion of those that used the support felt they were supported well (Table 7).

Table 7 Sources of support during lockdown for 1921 Catholics receiving ministry during the lockdown compared to 2462 Church of England members

Source	Catholic		Church of England	
	Used this source of support		Well supported	
	Number	%	Used %	Well supported %
Friends	1400	81	87	56
Family elsewhere	1327	77	79	58
Household	1306	75	74	86
Neighbours	1111	64	72	48
Members of your church	977	56	76	49
Local clergy	922	53	67	51
RC nationally	797	46	42	25
Medical services	735	42	42	44
Diocese	631	36	37	28
Government	521	30	30	30
Volunteers	287	17	17	35
Social services	110	6	5	22

Note. Ordered by percentage of the sample that drew on this source of support

“Friends” emerged as the most drawn on source of support- presumably because those who lived alone had no immediate household support, and many people may network more closely with their friends than with distant family members. It may also be that more distant family (such as elderly parents, children, or grandchildren) were contacted frequently, but were not necessarily people who gave support. Where household support was available, it was the most effective source of support, with 83% feeling well supported. The figures for this kind of support were similar to those for a comparable sample from the Church of England. Local clergy were a source of support for about half of the sample and, of these, under half felt they were supported well. This compares well with most other sources except family and friends. The proportion who felt well supported by local clergy was slightly lower

⁴ Using the base of the number who used this source of support.

than for the Church of England sample. Fellow parishioners ⁵ were also an important source of support (56%) and a similar percentage of those who received support felt well supported (43%). Fewer people needed medical support (42%), and 44% those that did felt well supported.

This evidence suggests that the people in the survey who received ministry from the Church did so partly through support from clergy and partly from other members of their parish. In terms of the level (and perhaps quality) of this support, it depended on the quality of interactions with good neighbours, which is what you might expect and hope for.

Online Pastoral Provision

Those who offered and participated in online services included both clergy and laity. A few respondents may have been reporting on the same church and some respondents may not have been aware what was being offered. This needs to be borne in mind when looking at the frequency with which services were reported as being offered during the lockdown. Despite these caveats, the data suggests there were a wide variety of expressions of service (Table 8). Half of the 371 people offering pastoral care reported their parish celebrated Mass of some kind at least on some Sundays. This was mainly a service where just the celebrant received. 7% reported services where people received in their homes and more work needs to be undertaken to clarify the form those took (e.g. visit by an Extraordinary Eucharistic minister or self-administration of unconsecrated bread and wine). A quarter of respondents reported that Eucharistic adoration was made available online on at least some weekdays. In the week leading to Easter, about a third offered services on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday of Holy Week, and this rose to about half for the rest of the week (Table 9). Just over a half reported they were able to offer Easter services.

Table 8 Reported frequencies of various sorts of Sunday and weekly Mass and wider spiritual provision

	No Sundays	Some Sundays	Every Sunday
Service of Word	58	5	37
Mass (Celebrant & participants)	80	3	17
Mass (Celebrant only)	42	5	53
Mass (People at home)	93	2	5
	No weekdays	Some weekdays	Every weekday
Morning Prayer	86	4	10
Evening Prayer	83	8	9
Other Daily Office	87	6	7
Weekday HC	75	3	22
Eucharistic adoration	75	17	8
Rosary	69	21	11
Other service	81	14	5

⁵ The ‘parish’ within British Catholicism is normally construed as members of the local congregation or community. This contrasts with the Church of England’s assumption that all those who live within the physical boundaries of ‘the parish’ as a place are ‘parishioners’.

Table 9 Services offered in Holy Week and Easter

	%
Monday of Holy Week	36
Tuesday of Holy Week	35
Wednesday of Holy Week	36
Maundy Thursday	51
Good Friday	53
Holy Saturday	46
Easter Day	55

Note. Proportion of 371 respondents who offered ministry who reported their church offered services on that day

Giving care and support

We wanted to find out how far those who offered ministry were involved in other kinds of work. The pandemic created the need for more practical help (such as delivering food or medicines to those who were sheltering), but also created difficulties in offering pastoral care. The impossibility of visiting patients with the virus in ICU wards, or the severe limitations on funerals, were widely publicised. We asked about various forms of ministry and, in each case, participants were asked to say what their church had been doing or tried to do during the lockdown.

To get a clearer picture it was decided to focus on the people who were most likely to know what churches were doing: parish clergy. The sample here was small (54 priests who answered the questions), so these results may not be reflective of the wider picture (Table 10).

Table 10 Care and support offered by churches during the lockdown as reported by 54 clergy

Category of support:	Not tried	Tried not possible	Some days	Most days
	%	%	%	%
Praying FOR people	4	0	13	83
Supporting core members	4	0	37	59
Supporting the elderly or lonely	4	2	43	52
Supporting the sick	6	4	52	39
Supporting the bereaved	4	2	59	35
Praying WITH people	11	13	43	33
Supporting other clergy	4	7	59	30
Delivering food	7	19	52	22
Delivering medicine	7	35	41	17
Supporting occasional attenders	9	13	67	11

Note. Sorted by frequency of being done on most days

Most churches had tried to do most of the activities listed in Table 10, and it was unusual for them not to be able to if they had tried. Delivering food and medicine were practical tasks that were probably done by parishioners. Supporting the vulnerable seemed to have been the main tasks for parishes on some or most days.

A second question asked more specifically about how well individuals had felt they could carry out different pastoral activities. They were asked to tick only those things that they had tried to do, and to indicate if they have found it impossible, felt it had been done mostly poorly, or felt it had been done mostly well. Table 11 shows the results for clergy and is sorted according to tasks that rated most often as either impossible or done most poorly. Things near the top of the list were those that involved networking in the wider community, such as working ecumenically or being a spokesperson, or which were requested but not possible, such as weddings or baptisms. Funerals were low on this list, so despite the restrictions imposed on numbers, clergy generally seemed to have managed well.

Table 11 Difficulty of doing tasks during lockdown

Task	Number trying to do this	% Found it difficult	% Difficult CoE sample
Weddings	41	89	61
Baptisms	41	87	67
Working with other denominations	47	72	69
Being a spokesperson	40	70	63
Supporting fellowship groups	44	67	48
Supporting young people	44	62	NA
Outreach and mission	48	56	45
Eucharistic ministry	47	47	48
Doing theological reflection	52	39	28
Receiving help	49	38	NA
Working with the local community	47	36	36
Your own spiritual life	51	35	29
Supporting work colleagues	47	32	23
Supporting the sick or dying	48	31	34
Bereaved	50	26	29
Supporting your congregation	52	25	11
Holy Week /Easter	48	24	12
Daily worship	48	22	35
Supporting your household	30	16	9
Prayer / spiritual support	51	14	11
Funerals	49	10	16

Note. ‘Found difficult’ is the proportion that tried this and either found it was not possible or felt it was done mostly poorly. Based on reports from 54 priests. Comparison with the Church of England based on a sample of 705 parochial stipendiary clergy.

Although the sample size here is small, the order of items was similar to that from a much larger sample of Church of England parochial clergy, suggesting common issues in pursuing ministry in lockdown.

Clergy receiving support

A final question for clergy was about the support they received during lockdown. They were asked to indicate if they had no support, some support, or were well supported by a range of people listed in Table 12. They were asked to tick only rows that applied to them, so these were people or places that might have been expected to offer some sort of support for clergy during the lockdown. Again, we focus here on parish clergy, and the table is ordered by those sources that seemed to offer the most support.

The pattern of support was similar in some ways to that from the larger Church of England sample, but there were differences that probably related to the differing circumstances of clergy in the two denominations. For example, support from their household was much more important for Church of England clergy, presumably because fewer lived alone. In both groups, support from the Church nationally came low on the list.

Table 12 Sources of support for 54 clergy during the lockdown

Source	Number expecting support	% No support	% Some support	% Well supported	% Well supported CoE
Congregation	50	2	36	62	50
Funeral directors	47	9	34	57	48
Household	35	11	34	54	82
Hospitals / medical	41	17	32	51	21
Ministry team	44	11	50	39	59
IT experts	49	29	35	37	28
Bishop etc.	52	21	50	29	39
Public	47	28	45	28	28
Diocese etc.	51	20	53	27	36
Church nationally	50	22	66	12	24

Overall, the picture that emerges from those who gave pastoral support is that parishes and others were offering a wide range of support during the lockdown, and that most had found ways of maintaining pastoral provision despite the restrictions. The most difficult tasks were either related to specific restrictions (for example on weddings or baptism) or working through complementary or collaborative apostolates (such as being a spokesperson, working ecumenically, outreach and mission). Familiar parts of routine ministry such as supporting parishioners, offering sacraments, and prayer support seemed to happen on most days in many places, and were the things that clergy felt they did best. Just under two-thirds of parish clergy felt well supported by congregations, but less well supported by more distant parts of the church or by the public.

Although the sample of clergy was small, the patterns that emerged in terms of difficulty in doing ministry, or in finding sources of support, were similar in many ways to the larger parallel survey from the Church of England. Identifying common issues and themes will be important as they emerge across denominations as Churches from different traditions reflection on the pandemic.

Attitudes to the lockdown

As the lockdown came into force it was clear that a number of related but slightly different issues would confront the Church during and after the pandemic. The sudden switch from long-established patterns of ministry to a new world of ‘virtual church’ was accompanied by the closure of churches for worship. Clergy for whom daily work involved face-to-face contact, pastoral work in homes, schools, prisons or hospitals, worship in buildings, and social gatherings around shared food and drink found themselves having to find new ways to express their ministry. Lay people were shut out of their churches and found that going to church on Sunday meant a trip between rooms rather than a morning walk or car journey and people who met only at church lost contact.

The survey tried to tap into these questions about the importance of church buildings by measuring attitudes to a range of different issues that were surfacing in April. Chief among these were the decisions to close church buildings the role of buildings in the life of faith, and the possibility of ‘virtual church’ becoming more important in the future.

A well-known method of assessing attitudes used by scientists is to produce statements that respondents can agree or disagree with. By offering statements that take a positive or negative stance on slightly different aspects of an issue it is possible to build up a more accurate picture than would be obtained by asking a single question. Those who received and gave ministry were mostly given the same items, though a few were tailored to reflect their differing contexts.

Attitude toward the lockdown of church buildings

Four items were specifically about the decision to close churches as the lockdown began. Responses suggested mixed views, but a majority felt closing church buildings was the right decision (Table 13). The questions were originally developed for the parallel Church of England survey, where clergy were excluded early on from their churches. This was not so for Catholic priests, so this might explain why so many agreed that clergy should always be allowed into churches, but the majority seemed to agree that closing churches generally was the right thing to do.

Table 13 Attitude toward the lockdown of churches

	DA	NC	AG
	%	%	%
Churches should stay open, whatever the crisis	60	14	26
Clergy should always be allowed into their churches	7	12	81
My denomination at the national level went too far in closing churches	61	17	22
Closing churches to everybody was the right thing to do	28	11	61

Note. Based on 1885 people who responded to all the items. DA = Disagree, NC = Not certain, AG = Agree.

Attitude toward church buildings generally

The specific act of closing church buildings during the pandemic raises the issue of how central they are for the Catholic worship and identity. Given the difficulties of maintaining church buildings some may see them as a financial burden and think we ought to close more church buildings. Yet for others these are sacred spaces that convey profoundly the presence of God, memory, place, participation or belonging. We captured some of this diversity of views within the survey (Table 14).

Table 14 Attitude toward church buildings

	DA	NC	AG
	%	%	%
Church buildings are central to our witness in the community	7	13	80
Many people will lose faith without church buildings in which to gather for worship	34	32	34
The local church building is crucial for my identity as a Christian [Minister]	23	29	48
I need the church building to fully express my faith [vocation]	26	24	49
The lockdown has shown that church buildings are an unnecessary burden	84	13	3
Forced closure of churches has focused us on proper priorities	33	35	32

Note. Based on 1,885 people who responded to all the items. Words in square brackets were those used for people who gave, rather than received, ministry. DA = Disagree, NC = Not certain, AG = Agree.

Large majorities rejected the idea that buildings are an unnecessary burden and agreed that they are an important witness. Opinion was a little more divided on how central the building is for faith expression or Christian identity, and whether the lockdown had actually helped the Church to focus on more important matters. The idea that people might lose faith without churches to go to was not well supported, but a third of this sample thought that might be so.

Attitude toward ‘virtual church’ and online spiritual offerings

The flurry of creative work on finding ways of harnessing the internet in the service of the mission and ministry of the Church brought to the forefront a growing phenomenon. The issue of ‘virtual church’ has been discussed for some time, and before the pandemic there were already Church communities that existed only as networks of people who worshipped and socialised entirely online.

As many others were introduced to this way of practicing one’s faith, it was interesting to see what they made of it. Would they prefer to return to ‘business as usual’ when all this is over, or would they judge that ‘virtual’ provision might be exactly what the Church needs to propel it into the 21st century? Table 15 shows responses to eight items related to this issue.

Table 15. Attitude toward virtual church

	DA	NC	AG
	%	%	%
The lockdown has helped the Church to move into the digital age	9	20	71
Online worship is a great liturgical tool	13	21	66
It has been good to see clergy broadcast services from their homes	17	47	36
Online worship is the way ahead for the next generation	51	35	14
Social media is a great pastoral tool	12	30	58
Social media is a great evangelistic tool	12	35	53
The lockdown is a great chance to re-think the Church’s future	19	27	54
Virtual Church will be more effective	46	43	10

Note. Based on 1885 people who responded to all the items. DA = Disagree, NC = Not certain, AG = Agree.

While over two-thirds of the sample thought that the lockdown had helped move the Church into the digital age, less than a fifth thought online worship was the way ahead for the next generation. This was seen by many as an opportunity to think about the future, but fewer imagined it would necessarily be a better way of being church. Only one in ten thought virtual ministry or ‘virtual Church’ would be more effective.

As with the effects of the lockdown mentioned earlier, responses to these sets of items could be used to produce scales that were a useful measure of someone’s overall attitude in these three areas:

- **Lockdown:** level of support for the actions taken to close churches during the pandemic
- **Buildings:** the extent to which buildings are believed to be central for faith and the life of the Church
- **Virtual Church:** the extent to which online worship and virtual ways of operating are seen as the way ahead for the Church

Those who felt buildings are more essential to their faith and wider religious life were also more likely to oppose the lockdown of churches. Similarly, such people also tended to be more negative about virtual offerings.

It was possible to see how attitudes varied between different groups of people in the sample. For these issues it seemed sensible to examine differences between some other groups to those used in Table 2, where the issue was about the effect of the lockdown on criteria like mood and stress. Attitudes here are less likely to be affected by whether or not someone lives alone or had to self-isolate during the pandemic. Instead we might expect things such as where someone lives (in a rural village or an inner city), whether they generally like modern or traditional worship and the generation to which they belong. A summary of the analyses is shown in Table 16.

Table 16 Summary of differences in attitudes towards closing churches, church building, and virtual church between various groups

		Sex	Age	Location	Worship preference	Ministry status
Lockdown	<i>Who was most opposed to closing churches?</i>	Men were more opposed than women	Younger people were more opposed than older people	No difference between those living cities, towns or the countryside	The more traditional someone's taste for worship the more they opposed the lockdown	No difference between clergy, lay ministers, or other lay people
Buildings	<i>Who felt buildings were most essential?</i>	Men felt this more strongly than women	Younger people felt more strongly about the importance of buildings than did older people	The more urban the location the more strongly people felt about buildings, but the effect was weak	The more traditional someone's taste for worship the more they felt buildings are essential	No difference between clergy, lay ministers, or other lay people
'Virtual Church/provision'	<i>Who was most positive about 'virtual church'?</i>	Women were more positive than men	No difference by age	No difference between those living cities, towns or the countryside	The more traditional someone's taste for worship the less enthusiastic they were about virtual provision	Lay leaders were most enthusiastic, followed by other lay people and clergy, who were least enthusiastic

Not all of the trends were easy to interpret, and some may challenge our easy stereotypes. Take the issue of age, for example. You might expect that it would be older people who were most attached to their buildings, and younger people who would be more willing to see them go and be replaced by virtual meeting places. Not so it seems: there was no overall effect of age on enthusiasm for virtual church, but younger people were more likely than older people to feel buildings were important. As you might expect, views about the lockdown, buildings and virtual church were strongly related to people's general preferences for modern versus traditional worship.

Responses of Church and State

As of July 2020, the national lockdown began to be eased and the first wave of the pandemic has dissipated there has been increasing discussion and debate about how the Government and others responded to the crisis. We asked questions related to this on the survey and it is interesting to see how people perceived the work done by the Church nationally and by government (Table 17).

Table 17 Attitude towards response to the crisis from various authorities

	RC			CoE		
	DA	NC	AG	DA	NC	AG
	%	%	%	%	%	%
My denomination at the national level has responded well to the crisis	17	30	53	24	33	43
The churches in my area have responded well to the crisis	14	35	52	7	33	60
The Government responded well when the virus threat emerged	55	23	21	53	24	22
The Government has led the nation well during the lockdown	51	28	22	46	28	26
The NHS has responded well to the crisis	5	13	82	2	8	90

Note. RC= Roman Catholic survey ($n = 1885$); CoE = Church of England survey ($n = 5812$). DA = Disagree, NC = Not certain, AG = Agree.

Responses from the two surveys were similar, though the Catholic sample had generally more positive views of how their Church had responded nationally, and more negative views about the response of local churches, compared to the Church of England sample. In both surveys, only about a fifth of people agreed that the Government had done well as the threat emerged or during the lockdown. There were some changes over time, but these are difficult to compare or interpret as the Catholic survey did not start until several weeks after the Church of England survey. In general, it seemed that churchgoers in both Catholics and Anglican communities were more positive about Church than Government response, and both were, in line with the rest of the nation, very positive about the NHS.

Future work

This report gives an outline of the overall findings from the main sections of the survey.

More detailed analyses of the data would be needed to confirm and interpret these findings, more fully. One potential area for future research that has been identified is that of the experience of clergy. The sample of clergy in this survey was not fully representative, but responses suggest it may require a distinctive approach.

There are plans for further reports to be produced by the academic team, but this is not possible at the moment because of the contrasting dates for various geographies. For example, the survey was also run in Ireland (Republic and Northern Ireland) and this will also provide some comparative material.

The core team involved in various aspects of the survey and report included:

Professor Francis Davis, University of Birmingham

Professor Andrew Village, University of York St John

Professor Leslie J. Francis, University of Warwick

Brenden Thompson, Catholic Voices

Volunteers at the Cathedral Innovation Centre